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WILDERSMOOR

A Novel

By C. L. ANTROBUS

"Let both grow together until the harvest."—Matt. xiii. 30.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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WILDERSMOOR.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was not a sad dinner. Aveland exerted himself to talk, and Quentin was always a good companion. Seeing her father animated, Frances too brightened. Surely he must be better! So the conversation flowed lightly on, serious subjects being tacitly avoided—the great shadow was too near.

But when Frances had left the two men alone, the smile died out of Aveland's eyes. He leant back in his chair, and said, with

the abruptness that betrays serious thought upon the matter:

"Quentin, there is something in human nature that compels a man to make a dying speech if possible. The tightest mouth uncloses, the slowest tongue wags, when a man knows he is facing the curtain. Silence is often imposed by circumstances on the most voluble of us; but when we see our order of release dated and signed, the desire of loquacity comes over us, and we pour out all the pent-up thoughts, feelings, and wishes that have been clamouring for utterance so long. All which brings me to what I was going to say—to the beginning of it, rather. Quentin, you are very lucky in knowing nothing of poverty—real poverty—for that is knowledge which is not good."

"Cash is useful," responded Fleming, as his host paused, "but——"

"Yes, I know what you would say;

and you are right. There is much it cannot buy. It will not give a man what Paton calls a 'sool'—have you noticed his peculiar pronunciation of that word? Nevertheless, the absolute want of it is apt to cause extremely unpleasant results, both immediate and later. I know, as I sit here to-night, that I shall not live a week; and I know with equal certainty that I die—at fifty-two—of useless privation in the past. I am a slain man, when I might have lived to old age—lived to enjoy name and fame, had I possessed but just enough to keep body and soul together in the days of my struggle with want. The curse of poverty kills slowly, like an insidious disease. People who have not starved—actually starved with slow, semi-starvation for years—don't know what they are talking about when they patter glibly about 'endurance,' and 'bracing effect,' and so on. The utmost squalor of the lower

classes has nothing to be compared with the wasting torture of the well-born, refined genius — whether male or female — under that iron pressure. First your health dies, then your buoyancy, then your enjoyment of life, lastly your capacity for action—all withered, blasted by the fell atmosphere of worry and despair that your poverty compels you to breathe. And the reason that these things die in you is because of the continual checking of healthy impulses. You have friends; you would like to see them. But no, your clothes are shabby; you cannot go to their houses. You have not enough to eat; how can you entertain? And by-and-by you cease to care. Then your ambitions—your God-given ambition to use the God-given gift within you—that too you must crush, for poverty does not suffer you to choose that phase of your profession most congenial to you. You must work at precisely that which will

bring in your wretched half-loaf; and your starved brain writhes at its unwelcome work, and your whole soul frets. By-and-by that goes too—the fret, I mean—and you begin dying. You no longer care for all—for anything that makes life more than a mere vegetable existence. You are not even an animal, for an animal—when not tortured by the accursed beast called man—is happy, riotously happy, over and over again. But you are a withering herb; your animal spirits, your intellectual cravings are dead, killed of necessity by the repression to which they have been subjected; and the miserable life that yet flickers in you is no more than a dull wonder, and a stunned wish for annihilation."

Aveland paused a moment, and his listener felt a pang of shame that this man should have so suffered for want of what he himself had had in such abundance that he never even thought of it.

"If I had known," he began, "if my father had known——"

"Yes," resumed Aveland, "I know what you would say. But your father never knew. One likes to keep one or two of one's friends in ignorance of the depth of one's humiliations. Your father believed in me. It was that for which I felt grateful. We had not met for years till I came down here, and he thought my health had kept me poor and obscure. I never told him my health had been good till those years of starvation. Most people smile derisively if one still maintains that if one had a chance one could prove one's capacity. The usual reply is that if you have capacity you will rise; your remaining at the bottom, or thereabouts, is a sure proof that you are a conceited fool. It is best to say nothing. What use to point out that this man had powerful friends, that man a private income which kept him from

the bitter need that has slain your dearest, and worse than murdered you? It is no use. The well-fed smile, and think it cannot be much hardship to go without a few luxuries. It never occurs to them that you may have to go without necessaries. Besides, there is a very general idea that the brain-worker ought to thrive on poverty. If you are clever—or think you are—why, you must expect to be poor; and it is your own fault if you remain so. The idea is, as you perceive, a singular muddle, but there is no doubt that it dwells in serene confusion in the minds of most well-fed human beings, especially when they are the relatives of the man or woman on whom God has bestowed the many-coloured robe of genius. Most of us have to remain in the pit into which our loving brethren hasten to cast us, or in the hands of the Midianites unto whom they sell us. And we are murdered, slowly murdered, by those

who refuse us the trifling aid we need; who tell us to make bricks without straw; who send us ragged and starving on a campaign that taxes the strength of the best-fed and best-equipped soldier. Well did the old Rabbis say that those who had suffered from poverty should never see hell. And why? Because they had seen it already, endured it, passed through it. Do you remember De Quincey's account of his own sufferings by starvation? He was a Lancashire man, by the way. You don't make enough of him—a delicate spirit, a most sympathetic and honourable gentleman! Do you recall his confession of the humiliating pain it cost him to pass a bread-shop with its smell of hot loaves? When I read that, I feel he is my brother indeed. There is a bread-shop at the corner of a street that has cost me agonies of bodily longing and mental fury at the humiliation of that sick hunger. By God!"

cried Aveland, with sudden passion, "I feel it still! That is a memory which lasts. Whatever else one forgets, one does not forget the hunger-pinch — nor those who caused it."

He leant back in his chair exhausted; the dark red flush on his face fading, leaving him of the whiteness of the sea-pebbles bleached by stress of storm—even as he.

Fleming poured him out some wine. He drank it, and resumed:

"This seems a peaceful haven in which to end my days; it has never been peaceful to me. Had the better luck, the trifling ease come earlier—come in time, before I had lost my wife and while I was yet hopeful—I think I could have been a very happy man, for I was naturally light-hearted. But it came too late. I am deeply thankful, for my child's sake, that it did come. With the little I shall leave her she will have a sufficiency, as far as one can

foresee the future; and Sandhayes is hers. She never knew her parents' poverty. As you know, my wife's cousin—one of those much-scoffed-at spinsters with hearts of gold—had the child here during our darkest days. Frances has no idea of what I am telling you now. But in this quiet haven I have ever tossed in spirit on the terrible seas that wrecked me. If I had to advise one entering life I would say—pray to care for nothing but yourself. Your own privations you may somehow endure, your own disappointments you may overcome, but the privations of those dearest to you blast your very soul. I have seen my wife ill, and have not had money wherewith to buy the food and wine that would have kept her in life. She died of privation. For that sort of thing nothing can compensate. When it is over, you are dead. For you the blue is gone from the sky and the green from the trees. People chatter glibly of

endurance—those who have never had anything to endure. There are some things beyond endurance. Priests say hereafter will compensate. I am a Christian, but I doubt it. When your soul has been thus ground into the dust of life's highway, that dust is in your eyes and in your mouth and on your spirit for evermore."

Fleming, from the depths of his respect and liking for Dr. Aveland, felt a rush of generous compassion. What must not this man have endured, or seen others endure, ere he could speak with such truth and bitterness? And feeling that sympathy in words would be jarring and useless, Quentin stretched out his hand—a strong, young, beautifully-shaped hand; the elder man laid his thin fingers in that firm grasp.

"Thank you for saying nothing, Quentin. There is nothing to say. You are like your father in your power of silence, when silence is the only fitting reply. He had

infinite sympathy and tact. And that brings me to what I wish to say, what I would have said to him had he been living. My tether is getting so short that I resolved to speak of it to-night. Who knows if I may be here to-morrow!"

Fleming glanced at him in surprise. Certainly Aveland looked ill—very ill. His brilliant eyes were sunken, and his face had the fatal waxen pallor of a malignant illness; yet he was sitting here at the table — he must have some weeks more of life in him. Aveland answered the glance:

"I may last a little while longer, or not. I think not. However, I have not that strange foreknowledge of the Oriental, who will fix the very hour of his death and keep the appointment. It was of Frances that I wished to speak. I am leaving her alone. She has relations, but she has never known them, and I do not wish her to know

them. They would but hate her as they have hated her father and mother. From Eden and Nazareth down to the present day, men and women of greater gifts and deeper thought than their fellows have usually found their bitterest foes in those of their own household. Instead of rejoicing that a soul worth anything should belong to them, they hate it; crush it if possible, lie about it, cry 'he hath a devil,' set every obstacle in the way of its advancement, scoff at its difficulties, advise it to turn hedger and ditcher rather than attempt to do anything which they feel they could never do themselves; rejoice if it starves, rejoice still more if it dies; and if by some strange stroke of luck some temporary oblivion on the part of the Prince of this world—if the poor struggling soul should succeed, down go the affectionate kindred on their knees and out come the tongues — not now to revile, but to lick the boots of the once-

despised one. You perceive, Quentin, that I have not yet finished unburdening my spirit," this with a gleam of his accustomed humour. "No, all things considered, I do not desire that Frances should know her relatives. But she will be alone, and she will have a little money. A lonely woman without money is a being to be kicked aside —what matter where she dies? A lonely woman with money is a being to be robbed —what matter if she starves? Therefore, Quentin, it has been in my mind to ask you to take care of her interests. You are rich and young, likely to live as long as she, and your wealth and influence will keep thieves at a distance—they will fear you. I feel sure the Patons, particularly Mrs. Paton, will do all in their power for my child; but Paton is no man of business. I have tied up most of the money safely enough; but she may wish to sell this house, or other contingencies may arise which I cannot foresee. I came

here for her sake, knowing that I must die soon and thinking your father would be a protection to her when I was gone. But he has gone first, and I know no one whom I could trust save you and McKie — and McKie is an old man. So long as he lives, Frances will not lack a friend. But should he die?"

Aveland stopped. He had said all this in his usual soft quiet voice; only the eager brilliance of his eyes betrayed how much it was to him. Quentin sat looking down on the table, a faint pallor showing itself beneath the tan of his face. Then he lifted his head, and with a sudden light in his eyes and a warm underflush banishing the pallor, said:

"Would you like me as a son, Dr. Aveland?"

"My dear lad, I should like none better. I should be content to go if I could see Frances your wife."

"I do not know that she would have me. I have thought of it ever since you brought her back to Wildersmoor. I did not speak sooner because I feared refusal." He hesitated an instant. "Since last winter I have been held back by a belief that perhaps I ought not to marry, seeing that a sort of Damocles' sword hangs over me. I have wavered this way and that; have sometimes thought my doubts the rankest folly; five minutes later they have seemed the only right view. You shall judge"—another momentary pause. "It was I who struck Ralph down!"

"Was it?"

Aveland's voice was as quiet as ever, his eyes rested on the young man with the same kindly brilliance. In his manner was no trace of surprise. When one has had a storm-tossed life, and sees the planks parting for the final plunge, one is not surprised at anything. And the absence of astonish-

ment on Aveland's part made it easy for Quentin to go on.

"I did not intend to kill him, of course. It was accidental. I had not the slightest idea that I had done him any serious harm. We met on the moor and quarrelled. Ralph said something and aimed a blow at me. I parried it, wrenched the stick from his grasp and struck him with it. The struggle did not last a minute. He fell, and I threw the stick down and walked home, thinking that I had merely knocked him down. I never for a moment imagined he was hurt. I suppose I must have hit harder than I knew, and the handle was loaded. I went home feeling very angry; in fact, I pondered as to whether I should not follow him and give him a sound thrashing, so little did I dream that I had killed him! Later in the evening he was brought to the Hall, as you know. At first I did not even realize that it was I who had

injured him. I thought he might have been attacked by a tramp, though tramps are rare on Wildersmoor. Then I could not believe he was actually dead. When I saw it was so, I said nothing. I suppose I was a coward. I had no clear idea as to what I should do. Had I found him myself I should have gone for assistance and owned to it, but in the confusion of his being brought to me I hesitated before committing myself, and ended by being silent. I was never once suspected, but I may be. Or an innocent man may be, which would oblige me to come forward. This contingency has held me back. I have felt I had no right to marry when at any time I might be tried for manslaughter and convicted. I suppose it would be manslaughter —not murder. A Woffendale jury would not hang me."

"Considering the general opinion of your cousin, I think a Woffendale jury is

quite capable of bringing in a verdict of justifiable homicide. They would, no doubt, consider the provocation. What did you and he quarrel about?"

"Well, I objected to his coming here. I had good reasons for doing so, independently of my own feelings about it."

"I also objected. My letter was found in his pocket, I believe."

"Yes. It was that which had annoyed Ralph. He first spoke of it to me. He imagined I had asked you to write it."

"I see. What did he say?"

Fleming's face darkened at the recollection.

"I would rather not repeat it. Of course I will if you wish."

"No, never mind. Who was the man who crossed the moor with Blind John?—Ulyett?"

"I think so. I am not absolutely certain, but it must have been Ulyett. He

had been at the Hall, and we parted on the moor just before I met Ralph. The fog was then coming on pretty thickly. Ulyett must have lost his way, and so come across John. If he is ever accused — if John should ever happen to meet him and recognize his voice, of course, I must acknowledge myself the one guilty."

"Is Ulyett likely to return?"

"He will certainly return some day, and, considering the climate, he may return very soon. Besides, Esmé Rusholme has got some idea that I killed Ralph—how she has got it I cannot imagine—and she has told me that if I marry she will reveal what she knows, whatever that may be. Perhaps it is merely suspicion on her part. I could not possibly ascertain what she knows, or fancies she knows; it seemed to me that my only course was to ignore her hints as beyond my comprehension."

"Why should Esmé Rusholme object to your marrying? What concern is it of hers? I understood your cousin was engaged to her."

As Aveland spoke, some remarks of Nina Paton's flashed across his mind. He and Mrs. Paton were the best of friends, and one day after Mrs. Holt's visit to Sandhayes, Nina — Frances not being present—had permitted herself to express pretty freely her opinion of Esmé Rusholme's intentions. It was possible that Esmé might scheme to marry the surviving cousin.

"Would Miss Rusholme marry you, Quentin?" Aveland asked, and there was visible hesitation in the young man's manner as he replied:

"I don't know that she and Ralph were actually engaged, but certainly I expected it, as also did others. As for myself, I have never thought of Esmé

save as an old friend—we were all playmates, you know. The idea of marrying her never once entered my mind; she is not the sort of woman I admire. I could not possibly marry her—not for any reason whatever. I'd rather be hanged."

Aveland felt answered. Quentin's evasive reply confirmed Mrs. Paton's surmises. The girl was playing a bold game for the Fleming wealth. Perhaps she really knew nothing; had only made a shrewd guess.

"Then your position is this: If you marry my daughter, Esmé Rusholme will accuse you of Ralph's death. Also, whether you marry or not, the innocent man who was Blind John's companion—whether he was Ulyett or not—may at any time again encounter John, and be recognized; in which case you would be compelled to confess. Is that it?"

"That is it exactly."

"Well, as regards the second contin-

gency, you are tolerably safe. I think more seriously of the first: it is an immediate threatening. Ulyett is related to the Rusholmes, is he not? You say you parted from him on the moor. Could he have overheard the quarrel between you and Ralph, and have by chance mentioned it to his relatives?"

"I have thought of that, particularly as Esmé alluded pointedly to Ulyett when she hinted at some knowledge she possessed. But I am absolutely certain that Ulyett would never do anything to cause me the least annoyance, and also I feel tolerably certain that he would not mention the quarrel if he did hear it."

"Then how do you account for Esmé Rusholme bringing Ulyett into the matter as you say she did?"

"Well, Ulyett came to me for advice that night. He was rather bothered about money matters just before he left England.

Esmé seems to have become aware of this, and she has drawn the conclusion that he was levying blackmail on me."

"Did you give him anything?"

"I lent him a trifle. That was before I met Ralph on the moor. I did not meet Ralph till I had parted with Ulyett. As I never told anyone of his visit, I cannot understand how Esmé has heard of it, unless George Rusholme knew something of Ulyett's affairs, and guessed that I had helped him. It can be but guessing. You are the only one to whom I have mentioned it."

"Ulyett called here that night, as I daresay Frances has told you. So far as I remember, he did not speak of having seen you. He seemed rather down at the prospect of Africa, and did not stay long. A kindly nature, and capable of great generosity, but unstable, I should imagine."

"Well, he's an unlucky fellow. He is

stable enough in his friendships. All things considered, I do not believe he heard the quarrel. I believe Esmé has heard of his embarrassments from her brother, and has imagined the rest. Still, if she accuses me, and drags in Ulyett, the chances are that he will be suspected, and then, of course, that will settle matters for me. If I were alone, as I am now, my fate—whatever it might be—would not materially concern others. But if I were married——" Quentin stopped.

"Yes," said Aveland, gravely, "at present you only are involved. I suppose," he added, tentatively, "that reward offered by your uncle is not a factor in the case? I mean—it seems an unjustifiable idea, but when people are in want of money they sometimes do astonishing things — is Esmé Rusholme in want of money?"

Quentin shook his head.

"The Rusholme girls have always plenty to spend, and Esmé prides herself on petty economies. No, that reward has nothing to do with it."

"I was only wondering whether its withdrawal would make any difference."

"I think not, except that it would lessen the risk of an innocent man being charged. As regards Esmé, I am sure it would make no difference. And my uncle will never withdraw it. The loss I have brought on him has been almost the worst part of it all to me. I don't blame myself for Ralph's death. I regret it very much, of course; but it was purely accidental. Not for an instant had I the faintest intention of killing him, as I have told you. I should have struck anyone else in precisely the same manner; and, seeing that I never meant to harm him, I do not feel any great remorse for what was really and truly an unhappy accident. What does weigh

upon me is the effect on my uncle. I have not only killed Ralph; I have killed the old man too. At his age the shock was too much. He has not got over it; he will never get over it. At first, I thought of telling him—I mean when he offered that reward. Then I turned coward, and said nothing. So he still believes in me—does not dream that it was I. I think that if he knew the truth he would withdraw his offer, but I cannot tell him."

"Tell no one," said Aveland, decisively; "there is unspeakable treachery in human nature. Judas is the type of the race. If you have one faithful friend, you are happy indeed. For even if those around you are not directly treacherous like Judas, they will be indirectly treacherous like Pilate. When you are helpless, they—well-meaning and sympathizing — will yet listen to advice from your enemies, and will deliver you to pain and death—with

much regret, possibly, and vehement washing of hands; yet they will so deliver you."

"It may be so," said Quentin; "I believe it is so. Anyway, I have not told anybody, though at times I have felt as though it would ease my conscience to do so."

"Ah, there is the pull of the Romish Church. They know that desire to confess, and utilize it. It is, no doubt, a safety-valve. Personally, I should prefer sitting upon the safety-valve, no matter what the consequences. I'd rather be blown into meteoric dust than place myself at the mercy of my fellow-man."

"I am undoubtedly sitting on the safety-valve," said Quentin, gloomily. "Nothing would silence Esmé but my marrying her, and that I will not do. So there I am!"

"Crosier admires her, I have heard," remarked Aveland.

"Yes; but Esmé won't look at him,

though he is a good little fellow, and will never end in a convict prison, as I may do."

"She might look at him if he had a living. A friend of mine has the gift of one down in Somerset; a pretty place, and well out of the way. The living will soon be vacant. The present vicar is eighty-nine, and so feeble that he is hardly likely to live another year. I think I will mention Crosier to my friend. I can recommend him with a clear conscience."

Fleming visibly cheered up.

"You are too good," he said, gratefully. "If you knew how ashamed I feel to intrude my miserable affairs on you!"

"My dear lad, your affairs are mine if you marry my daughter. Also, I wish to help you for your own sake, to say nothing of my old friend, your father. If Esmé Rusholme were married, and settled in a snug vicarage down in Somerset, it

is hardly likely she would trouble herself about any Woffendale matter. Her own importance in the parish would be uppermost in her mind. Besides, she would no longer be here to pull the strings. Of course, there is the risk that she may take immediate action. That cannot be helped. It must be risked. With regard to the question as to whether you should marry with this possibility of being tried for manslaughter hanging over you, I think I will not express any opinion. I cannot tell whether Frances would accept you. I do not know what may be her feelings towards you. If, however, you should decide on trying your fate, I will say that it would give me great comfort if I could leave Frances in your care. If I were tolerably sure of a life of average length, I might hesitate, might urge at least, some delay; but a man who is dying has no right to hamper the living by any utterances

of his, however well-meant and seeming wise. For his death changes life for those around him; new complications arise which he could not foresee, and he is not there to straighten them. Thus his wishes and commands, meant for the best, often bring about the very results that the dead man himself intended to guard against. I cannot tell what may happen when I am gone; therefore, I shall leave my child untrammelled by any wish of mine. I believe I would rather she married you, even with that risk ahead, than drift about the world alone—perhaps, at last, to marry some man utterly unknown to me and utterly unworthy of her."

"I would take care of her, Dr. Aveland," said Fleming.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LATER that evening, when the scarlet-shaded lamps were lit—for even in June the long day goes at last — Dr Aveland sat writing the letter which would give Crosier that Somerset living so entirely unexpected by him. When any good fortune comes to us, we are apt to regard it as the result of our own merits. It never occurs to us that a kindness may be done with the object of getting us out of the way. However, in this case it was not Crosier who was to be got out of the way, but Esmé Rusholme; and the Curate was

decidedly the gainer, for he hereby obtained a snug home in a pastoral district, when otherwise he might have waited long for a living and missed his bride altogether.

Aveland never put off writing a letter. A troubled life had given him that instinctive fear of the morrow that never comes to those who have always sailed on an even keel. And this instinctive fear was heightened by his illness. If the letter could in any way smooth his daughter's path in life, there was good reason indeed for not delaying by even one post. So Aveland wrote; and having sent what he had written to the village post-office, leant back in his chair and looked out of the window into the summer twilight, where two figures now and then came in sight among the garden trees. At the gates the two clipped yews — the boat and the tea-pot—loomed darkly against the green light

of the western sky; Aveland's eyes fell on the quaint shapes and a half-smile curved his lips, a smile of quiet contentment as of one who has done his work. Truly it was well to have come here; he would leave his daughter as he had hoped and wished. There was indeed that ominous cloud on the horizon, yet it might drift harmlessly away. So many threatened evils never come to pass.

Therefore Aveland watched the slow melting of that June day into night with more of peace and rest than many years had given him.

And the two in the garden? It was very pleasant out there, the salt air mingling with the scent of honeysuckle, for there was much honeysuckle on Wildersmoor. It flung itself recklessly about the moorland, fighting for hold with the brambles; clambered over the farmhouses and the cottages; and the Sandhayes porch upheld

a mass of honey-filled flowers, to the joy of many winged things.

"How sweet the honeysuckle is!" said Frances, "and the moths are arriving. Moonrise is their dawn. Do you see those little dusky shadows flitting here and there? Those are the moths, and there is the moon."

"Only the silver tip as yet," said Quentin, looking towards a bank of cloudlets over the moor. "Does not Keats say Selene is stooping to tie her sandals when the crescent curves like that?"

"Yes, and compares the clouds to bean-blossoms — little black and white things, you know."

There was a slight, vaguely-felt constraint between them. They spoke at random — of this and that — of anything. In the dusk Quentin could not see his companion's face, save when they passed the dining-room windows, which on this warm

evening were uncurtained and open, the lamplight streaming out across the sandy paths. They stood for a moment looking in upon Aveland as he sat in the glow of the scarlet shades writing that last request to his old friend. He appeared younger, happier, better, and his daughter's heart was cheered. In after years one of her most vivid recollections was that of seeing him sitting there, close under the tall lamp, by the little table only big enough to hold an inkstand and Ptolemy. For Ptolemy was a literary feline and took much interest in letters, observing the progress of the pen with pricked, attentive ears; now and then tentatively stretching out a silky black paw, doubtful whether or no to play with the active quill. Against the soft yellow-brown background of the room, and faintly flushed by the lamplight, Aveland's features seemed to lose their pinched pallor — to return to their natural hue as of warm ivory. And

thus seen, like a pale cameo, the antique beauty of his face and head was very apparent. Four hundred years the Romans ruled in Britain—a longer period than from now back to Elizabeth—forming colonies, bringing not only Roman but Greek and Syrian blood into the island, and that it is still a living stream is proved by hundreds of English faces, of which the originals may be seen on coins and busts and statues eighteen centuries old and more.

The two without still looked on Aveland, lingering unconsciously longer than the natural restlessness of youth inclines. Afterwards they were glad — Frances especially glad—that they had done so.

"He is better—I am sure he is better," she said, softly, as they drew away from the window.

"Oh, yes, he is better," Quentin echoed.

They strolled along a path on the moorland side of the garden, and Frances turned

her head to listen to the swish and lap that came from out the western gloom.

"How still it is! There is not a sound but the splash of the tide, and hardly that."

"It is nearly high," said Fleming. "There has been scarcely a ripple all day. As for the moor, its voice never rises above a whisper unless a gale is blowing."

"And then the wind wakes up the trees to talk—yes, I know. I have always loved that silence of the moor. I have wondered how I shall find courage to leave it—if I must leave it. Yet I do not think I could live alone at Sandhayes."

"Could you live at Wildersmoor?"

They were standing at the end of the path by the low thorn hedge that divided garden and moor. The crescent moon had sailed clear of clouds and threw a faint light over the wide dim blurred plain, the trees showing but as deeper blurs in the darkness.

"Could you live at Wildersmoor?" Quentin repeated. "The Hall is yours and all that I have—and myself, if you will take me. How lamely one says these things! I have thought of nothing else for months and years, and now I cannot find fitting words in which to tell you so simple a thing. I wish I were a fisherman in the village yonder, who can tell a woman he loves her by appearing at her door with a clean face and a big fish."

"You have often appeared at the door with a clean face," said Frances, demurely, "but I shall expect the fish."

By-and-by they went indoors and told Aveland.

"I am more than content," he said. "What can I say to express my contentment? It is the happiest news that has fallen on my ears for very many years."

Quentin stayed late at Sandhayes that June night, lingering by the white gate

between the clipped yews. The last lover who turned away from that gate was Ulyett —a perforce silent lover, a justly-ruined man, another fragment of human debris—so useless we say. Yet shingle, which is but debris, helps to check the flowing tide and affords firm foothold. Ulyett went out into the chill December fog—as was fitting for him. Quentin—as was equally fitting, into the summer night, with step as light as his heart.

The future unrolled itself like the year as he brushed the dew from the moss. Now was his summer—flower-crowned—beneficent, with promise of fuller luxuriance and autumn's golden fruition. In the distance of time, age, like "a lusty winter, frosty but kindly;" with "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends." And so indeed it was to be. For the man of Uz spoke truth when he said, "One dieth in his full perfection, being wholly at ease and

quiet; and another died in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure." And none can tell why this or that should be. Time and chance happen to all. Quentin Fleming was one of the lucky ones of the earth. Good-tempered, honourable, rich; with no especial gifts, those jewels of God that excite the hatred of those who can only wear jewels of earth; having none of these, but possessing wealth, Quentin must needs be lucky.

But Aveland—whose gifts were many, and whose guardian angel was therefore of a sterner order—belonged to those who die in the bitterness of their souls. To-night, however, he brightened visibly under the cheering knowledge that his child would not stand alone at his death. Yet he strove to read her future, with that pathetic striving which feels the uselessness of the effort. The years to come did not unfold themselves to him as they did to Quentin. With

the intuitive doubt and dread that result from too close grapple with the wolf, Aveland looked on the shining curtain of to-morrow and wondered fearfully what it might conceal.

"It is what I wished," he said, when Frances came in with eyes dazzled by the lamplight, and sat down on a low stool by his chair, leaning her head against his arm. "It lifts a weight of anxiety from me. I hope you may be very happy, my dear."

"There is no one like you, father," the clear tones faltered slightly. "But I think" —with tender jesting—"I have taken the next best."

"Assuredly," replied her father, and there was a little silence.

Then Aveland roused himself to speak of the future, when he would be no longer present to advise. Perhaps having unburbened his soul to Quentin earlier in the evening impelled him to further utterance.

It was no feeling of increased weakness. On the contrary, he felt stronger, because happier.

"I wish," he said, "that I could be always here to watch over you. But that is not to be. Neither is it the course of nature. Curious that natural events should be the bitterest—Time, and Change, and Death. I trust no change may come to you that is not a happy one. Yet if it should, do not let any troubles of this world blight your spirit. I will not speak of the pleasures. Ease of life will not transform you into that terrible type of woman whose existence has run in such smooth grooves that she is utterly oblivious of everything outside her own four walls—the woman who turns down her thumb when the beaten fighter looks up from the arena for mercy. You will not become such. But even wealth and affection cannot always shut out sorrow; and so I say

to you, Frances, if care or disappointment should touch you, still remain yourself. It is not fashionable now to quote the Lord God Incarnate, yet His words remain the same, and it is well to ponder the seed choked by the *cares* of this world. I hope and believe Quentin will be a good husband, a strong, faithful companion. Still, if not, let his failure neither harden nor weaken you. Strive not to become either fretful or bitter. Do not permit the iron to enter too deeply into your soul; it gives too dark a colouring. Remember your own independent personal life, and do not suffer your individuality to be degraded by any circumstances. Though God died the death of a slave, He did not lead the life of one. Let no motive of expediency decoy you from the path you would instinctively take if you stood alone. 'Be true,' says the Greek proverb, 'to the dreams of thy youth.' I think I have been true. I do

not know that they have brought me much material advantage. That is not their office. Doubtless the Baptist was true to the dreams of his youth—and what did they bring him? A prison and a severed head. That is what they usually bring—more or less. Yet they are worth their price. Therefore I say, be true to them. They preserve youth of heart, and eyes of youth, and dew on the soul. For a woman to keep these dreams is more difficult than for a man. The petty details of a household are antagonistic to them; and the marble that might have fashioned a Deborah is broken into sharp fragments for a cemetery path—fragments that hurt the tired feet, and are merely so much waste and ruin. I have often thought you something of a Deborah, my Frances," Aveland went on, tenderly; "a mother in Israel and a ruler. I trust your life may be as honoured and serene as hers. I am sure

it will not be less noble. I do not know that I can give you any better advice—any advice that might be of especial use to you." He paused, thinking of Quentin's confession. Should Frances be told? On the one hand, the knowledge might save her from a possible shock; on the other, it would overshadow her with a dread contingency that might never arise. Her father decided on silence.

"After all," he resumed, "vague advice is not likely to be of much use; and moreover, I should not like you to remember me as prosing away about generalities on this eventful evening of your life."

"Dear," said his daughter, "you could not be prosy if you tried. Do not speak like that. Let me bring you some wine. You look so pale!"

In truth, Aveland did look singularly transparent. He drank the wine, and smiled at his child's anxiety.

"It is growing late, and I am tired; that is all. I feel better to-night—much better. Perhaps I am going to live—who knows? God bless you, my child. Good-night."

Aveland *was* going to live—but a life quite different to that which he had hitherto known; for in the morning his daughter found him dead, lying on his side, calm and composed, having evidently died in sleep.

He was buried in the little churchyard at North Rode, within sight of Sandhayes. Perhaps it was not the resting-place he would have liked best—not his native village basking in the hot sunshine, with the white dust blowing over the roses, and cawing rooks flapping lazy wings. But, assuredly, in that native village his rare personality would not have received the recognition it met with here. For all

Wildersmoor came to the quiet funeral; gentle and simple they crowded—a grave, silent crowd—through the old lych-gate, to pay Aveland the respect of their presence. Many of them he knew but slightly, some not at all. Yet they were there to show their unspoken admiration of the stranger who had dwelt among them. Even Woffendale sent a small contingent—including old Elkanah Fleming—to honour the man to whom a manufacturing town was almost as poisonous as a relation.

The elder Fleming had signified his approval of his nephew's engagement. "And I'll come to the funeral, lad. It is true I felt mad about that letter of Aveland's, forbidding Ralph the house; but that's neither here nor there. I'll come. Frances Aveland is a handsomer woman than Esmé Rusholme, and you're right to choose for yourself. Maria must be content with the Curate for her favourite."

So Elkanah came to North Rode, and many others, including Granny Darlow and Blind John. And later, the Vicar remarked upon the largeness of the gathering.

"I am somewhat surprised," he said to Quentin. "Considering Aveland's secluded life I should not have expected any attendance at his funeral, save, of course, his daughter and most intimate friends."

"Well, you see, Paton, you don't understand us yet. This isn't an eastern county. When a man or woman of originality happens to live among us, we have the sense to discern their gifts and pat them on the back. Down east they seem to kick them out of doors by way of a hint not to be different from other people. The north has the faculty of appreciation."

"I do not think Aveland cared for the north," said the Vicar, perversely.

"Perhaps not, but we cared for him.

And he liked it well enough to spend his last years here."

"A pity he was wasted, so to speak, in comparative obscurity."

This time McKie answered.

"Aveland was sair let and hindered in running his race," he said, with a backward glance at the churchyard, "yet I doubt me if he would have greatly risen in any case. He could never stoop to dirty tricks, and that's a sair hindrance to a man. The multitude in every profession aye call for their pet Barabbas. And why not? It is but natural. The rogue is one o' themselves. Folk canna thole a man mair righteous than they. It's just an insult."

"Are not your strictures rather sweeping?" asked the Vicar.

"Truth is aye sweeping," said McKie.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE last day of July dawned cloudlessly on Wildersmoor; a day of pale, intense heat that seemed in subtle harmony with the broad-faced hemlocks that spread their white discs to the sun as though they would grow whiter in the blaze. There was not a breath of air to stir the motionless leaves hanging over the brown pools where the blue dragonflies darted to and fro like signal flashes. Even the gold-green beetles crawled languidly up the stems, or clung, like spots of emerald light, to fronds of bracken and hart's-tongue.

The silence of summer had settled down on the moor, and there were no sounds save the drowsy hum of insects and the soft growl of the sea; and, as the morning wore on, a joyous ringing of the North Rode bells. For that morning Frances Aveland and Quentin Fleming were married at the little village church.

A few, very few, friends were present. Nina Paton, of course, and the Vicar in his clerical capacity, Elkanah Fleming, and McKie. With these came the whole population of North Rode, and many people from other parts of Wildersmoor, including Blind John, Vose, and Granny Darlow. Aveland—dead so recently—was present in the minds of all. An impressive personality may be disliked, it cannot be ignored; and on Wildersmoor there had been no dislike, but a friendly admiration that became possessive as time went on; and culminated in sturdy liking for his daughter—all that was

visibly left to remind them of him. So they came to wish her good luck, and her husband too. Fleming had always been popular. But it was Frances who had drawn the masculine spectators. Her father being dead, they felt a sort of responsibility respecting her. She was left there alone on the moor, and she had grown up among them. Therefore the stalwart fishermen and farmers gathered in the little church with a serious air, as of men doing their duty, and dispersed at the close of the ceremony with an air of satisfaction and many gruff and heart-meant congratulations; and also with many sympathetic glances towards Aveland's sunlit grave. A pity he died so soon!—a pity!—a pity!—that was the thought of all as Frances and Quentin came down the narrow path. They went straight to the station, intending to spend the next two months abroad.

"I hope she will be happy—I think

she will," said Nina, watching the train out of sight. It also bore away the elder Fleming and McKie back to Woffendale, so the Vicar and his wife strolled home alone.

"Of course she will," said Paton, with serene assurance. He was quite reconciled to the marriage. Certainly he still preferred Esmé Rusholme. To his eyes she was the perfect type of woman. But as Nina refused to appreciate her many excellences, doubtless it was best that Quentin Fleming should marry a woman with whom Nina was intimate.

"I don't know about 'of course,'" pursued Nina, reflectively. "When a woman has had a good and charming father, there is less chance of her being happy in the married state than when she has had a bad or ordinary one. Quentin Fleming is tremendously nice, but he is not Dr. Aveland."

"A husband is a husband," quoth the Vicar, decisively.

"Precisely. That is the point."

"And it is her duty to place him first in all her thoughts."

"That is what makes it so infuriating. Besides, it's impossible. The fact is, the average husband is a great deal more pleasant to live with than the average father, hence the general readiness of women to marry. But the best husband that ever existed is simply not in the same street with the best father. There is nothing anywhere — no, not anywhere in the world — to equal a charming and sympathetic dad. My dad was neither the one nor the other; but Dr. Aveland — why, Cyril, I do not believe you are listening one bit."

"I was wondering," returned the Vicar placidly, "whether Mrs. Fleming would put up a stained-glass window to her father's

memory. You might suggest it to her, Nina."

His wife laughed.

"Of course I will, dear, and she will do it. She will do many things for us, and Mr. Fleming shall help us to a bishopric. We will go to Heaven in the episcopal purple, which is a deal more comfortable than the rags of Lazarus."

However, it is only fair to say that Paton would have been equally earnest on behalf of his church and parish had he himself been clothed in those same rags, and with no prospect of anything better.

The day wore on with its heat and light and beauty, the wedding-bells ringing out joyously from the square tower seaward and moorward. The sunshine quivered over Aveland's grave, turned golden, crimson, died, giving place to grey twilight and the light of stars, and noiseless flitting of soft moths above the grass instead of the sound

of clashing bells. Through those hours Frances and Quentin sped southward and further south, and the sunshine travelled with them.

"Good luck to 'em!" said Vose, at the Grey Wolf that evening, giving the toast. Vose was busy and in his glory, Quentin having arranged that a dinner should be given at the Wolf to all who chose to come; a similar entertainment being provided at the Hall for the women and children.

"I hannot been so thrutched sin' th' inquest," said Vose, with a beaming face. "Eh!—that wur a toime! Dost thou moind it, John? Tha did a big day's talking then."

"Ay," replied John, who had returned from North Rode in a friendly waggon with Granny Darlow; telling her that she need not cook his dinner because he "wur going to dine at th' Wolf loike a' th' rest o' the world, an' wur minded to stay theer till neet just to see th' folk." John always spoke of

seeing people. "So," he added graciously, "tha con go up to th' Hall as soon as tha pleases."

"Dost tha think," she responded, in tones of scorn, "as I'm going to th' Hall when Fleming hissen isna theer? Nay, I am na that keen after victuals."

"Victuals!" retorted John, indignantly, "it's th' company tha goes fur. I'll not deny th' victuals helps loike, but tha dunnot go fur 'em. Tha goes fur company," with emphasis.

"Well then," Granny replied, with equal scorn, "I am na keen after company."

John pondered. He could not decide whether Granny's reluctance to partake of the festivities arose from pride or fear. "Happen hoo thinks hersen too good fur th' company," he muttered to himself too low for Granny to hear, "or happen hoo knows th' company would think theirsen too good fur *her*. Eh!—that's it! Hoo's

feart o' th' women's tongues when Fleming isna by to keep 'em down."

Herein John was mistaken. Granny was afraid of nothing. She did not care to join in the wedding feast because the chief actors had departed, and no one who interested her would be present. For most of her own class she felt supreme contempt, and rarely held any intercourse with them. Here and there was one towards whom she showed some slight friendliness; Vose, for instance. Perhaps she intuitively recognized in Vose the capacity for action swayed by strength of feeling and generosity of mind that always aroused Granny to sympathy. These were qualities in which Blind John was conspicuously deficient. Hence he never understood her. Satisfied that he had hit upon the true reason of her remaining at home, he sat and chuckled softly as the cart rolled on over the peaty track, the North Rode bells growing fainter till the

creaking of the heavy wheels alone broke the hot stillness. No one spoke. Once the driver pulled out a silver watch about the size of a prize tomato, and observed that it was half-past three. A little later he clambered down without stopping the plodding horse, and gathered a bunch of honeysuckle.

"May as well ha' a posy on a wedding-day," he said, arranging it in his button-hole. "Will ye have some, Missis?"

Granny signified assent, and the driver climbed back with a noble handful of the sun-stained flowers, which he gallantly handed to the old woman. In his manner there was a certain indefinable masculine appreciation of and sympathy with her past; and Granny responded, taking the honeysuckle with a similarly indefinable brightening and warmth, as when red embers are blown to sudden transient glow by some passing breath of wandering wind.

Then John had a spray put into his coat; and thus decorated, the party in the cart journeyed onwards—silent once more—to the Grey Wolf.

As the shadows lengthened, there was much chatter and laughter at the Hall, and louder talking and laughter at the Wolf. And a little way off, Granny sat at her cottage-door, facing the sunset. And thus, sitting apart and alone, she yet saw and heard more than any of those who feasted, and laughed, and drank the health of the married pair. For Granny saw and heard all that was said and done, knowing well all that would be said and done by the feasters. And above and beyond this she saw the white moths flitting above Aveland in North Rode churchyard, and heard the moan of the sea and the rustle of the grass as the night-wind stirred it; elemental voices speaking in unknown tongues, yet neither impossible nor difficult

to comprehend if listened to in a certain sympathetic spirit. For sympathy is the key to all knowledge whose fruit is good. There is a knowledge whose fruit is evil; for that no sympathy is needed. But to the human creature who can—if only for a little while—strip himself of the monstrous egotism of the race, and with conscious atavism and sympathetic feeling, throw himself back into the life of the dust, of stones and wood, of wind and sea, mingling sensibly with the elements of which he himself is a more conscious fragment, a more complex mingling; not thinking nor — worse still — talking about them, but simply listening thus humbly to the earth-voices—to that human spirit will come the knowledge which is divine. He will pass from listening to a deep understanding of this world and the creatures therein, to a keen intuition and a compassion as keen and deep; able, as it were,

to drift at will through all grades of being, from the sea-coral to his nearer kin in fur and feather, things that rejoice in pleasant warmth and sweet coolness, in light and health—even as he.

Thus drifting, he will comprehend and love, which will be well for him; for sympathy is the wedding-garment, lacking which none shall stand in the presence of God. Doubtless there will be many a rent in the garment before its owner passes in to the Wedding Feast; for the highways are rough, and humanity is the weakest thing upon earth. But the Host will not be extreme to mark what is amiss. The possession or non-possession of the garment is the difference between John and Judas.

Granny's soul-garment, it must be confessed, was by no means in good repair. In truth, it might be said to be in tatters, and here and there were ugly red stains.

Yet she wore the garment, and the unrent portions thereof were fair and shining. There were allowances to be made for Granny. A densely ignorant, aspiring spirit, with much about her that was terrible, much that was noble. The thirty pieces did not attract her. Gold and jewels kindled no answering glitter in those black eyes. And of how many men and women can we say as much?

So being what she was, and listening through the long years to the voices on Wildersmoor, Granny, poor and ignorant, was yet able to comprehend the thoughts and feelings of men and women far removed from her by education and position. She had appreciated Aveland, and intuitively understood that life had been hard to him, and death hard too. She saw perfectly the mental likeness between him and his daughter, and resolved to champion that daughter if need be. And Granny

was no mean ally. Now that Frances had married Quentin Fleming, Granny's self-imposed task of protection seemed easier: only one household for the keen old eyes to guard.

She sat long by her door that evening in the twilight, a solitary figure apart, while all the hamlet feasted and laughed. Then the night air blew softly from the sea, and Granny rose, looked up at the Great Bear shining over her cottage roof, set a dish of scraps outside for her neighbours' cats—she had none of her own—glanced towards the brilliantly-lit Wolf, and shut the door. There was no light in her cottage-window when the revellers trooped home; but, with the light slumber of old age, she heard Blind John's stick tapping over the ground as her tall Dutch-clock struck twelve.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Mrs. Holt had declined to accompany her brother-in-law to the wedding. She said she considered Quentin's choice injudicious, and she would not countenance it.

"Please yourself, Maria," said Elkanah, when he started for North Rode that sunny morning; "I don't suppose the lad wants you, or the lass either. It was but civility that made them ask you, because you are living with me."

Mrs. Holt had replied stiffly that she had arranged to spend a week at Llandudno, and should take Esmé Rusholme with her;

"therefore it is not to be expected that I should change my plans for this mistaken marriage."

"Take the Curate, too," suggested Elkanah, with a wink. "What is his name? Crosier? Take him to console Miss Esmé."

Now this was precisely what Mrs. Holt had intended doing, but that her brother-in-law should suggest it, annoyed her; so Crosier was not invited to Llandudno, and Esmé consequently had time wherein to reflect on the trick that Fate had played her. True, she could marry Travis Crosier, and she resolved to do so; but what was the prospect of a country parsonage compared to the wealth of the Flemings? Her thin lips grew tighter and her cold grey eyes more steely as she thought of all she had missed. Material advantages were to her the one end and aim of life, and of these Quentin had deprived her. Had Ralph not died on Wildersmoor she would

have married him. Of this Esmé was positive. Probably she was right. Now, having slain Ralph—according to Esmé's belief—it was clearly Quentin's bounden duty to make full amends and purchase her silence by marrying her; thus giving her the house, carriage, diamonds, and general envy that would have been hers had she married his cousin. She was sure Quentin had sealed her cousin Jack Ulyett's lips with that thousand pounds. Yet she, who had lost most by that foggy night, got nothing! The longer Esmé pondered the more evil were her thoughts. She recalled the interviews in which she had plainly intimated to Quentin the sole condition of her silence, and his reply was—his marriage to Frances Aveland. Therefore she would strike with the weapon she held, and that hard. She had every possible reason of the average dishonourable mind. Disappointed ambition, hatred of the man

who had rejected her, and still bitterer hatred of her unconscious rival — the unsleeping hate of the inferior, which cannot be appeased by aught save the uttermost degradation of that superior, and which, therefore, is so seldom appeased.

It was Esmé's nature to go cautiously to work, with petty lying and much scheming; so in this matter she decided on writing to her cousin Jack Ulyett before publicly accusing Quentin. If Jack answered, the letter might contain further evidence. If not, the slight delay was of no consequence.

The writing of that letter was a real consolation to Esmé. She detested Ulyett, and pictured with satisfaction his amazement and annoyance when he would receive it. She wrote it slowly. Esmé was not an adept with the pen, and her literary style was awkward and infantine in the extreme. But her meaning was perfectly clear. However infantine her sentences might be, there

was no ambiguity about them. She knew what she wished to say, and she said it; with many laments over the additional shock that was coming to Elkanah Fleming, whom she revered as a father. The gist of the letter was that Quentin was suspected of having caused Ralph's death. In fact, it would soon be common gossip. There was every probability that he would shortly be arrested. She—Esmé—would feel it her duty to reveal what she knew, and her Cousin Jack must pardon her also revealing the state of his affairs at the time he left England, and how Quentin had thereby been able to purchase his silence. Then, suspecting Ulyett's admiration of Frances Aveland, Esmé told him all particulars of the wedding, adding that it was "sad indeed to look forward to her life as the wife of a convicted criminal, but when people married for money they had no right to complain if a judgment fell upon them."

For Esmé, like Mrs. Holt and many others, was persuaded that Providence ordered all things with especial reference to her private animosities.

The letter was long. Indeed, its composition occupied the spare moments of several days. One evening at the end of the week, Esmé put on her hat to meet the Rev. Travis Crosier, who was coming to the same hotel for a short holiday. She intended to meet him accidentally as it were, on his way from the station.

"I have a letter to post, dear Mrs. Holt. Have you any?"

"Thank you, my dear, yes. There is a note to my brother-in-law on the table. You are always so thoughtful. Have you been writing to your mother again? What a devoted daughter you are!"

Esmé did not explain the destination of the letter she held. It would not do for the Rev. Travis Crosier to hear that

she wrote to a spendthrift cousin. As she dropped her packet into the box she smiled and said softly to herself,

"That will surprise Jack!"

It did. It surprised him so much that he rose from the bed on which he was slowly recovering from fever, and insisted on sailing for England by the next steamer. He must go at once, he said. He would resign his appointment; that was nothing, for anyway, he could not hold it long. The men who listened did not contradict him, for when West Coast fever meets with an enfeebled constitution and a disappointed life, the end of the encounter is easy to predict. Ulyett had meant to drift to death out there, helped mightily thereunto by the fever-spectre. But Esmé's letter was a call to action, so strong that he temporarily beat back the deadly sickness, and rose and walked ghostlike—but his own ghost, his own jesting, reckless self. He must

go home, he repeated vehemently, and his acquaintance bestirred themselves after that blessed fashion which does what you wish without asking why you wish it. Thus it happened that a fortnight after the arrival of Esmé's letter Ulyett was afloat and homeward bound.

CHAPTER XXX.

The west wind, blowing up from the sea over Wildersmoor, brings a damp, warm atmosphere, so that on that coast the rainy days far outnumber the fine ones. Even in summer the Pike often wraps itself in grey mist, and a soft drizzling rain fills all the air, giving a deeper green to the mosses, a brighter sheen to the grass.

Granny Darlow's cottage was one often met with in that part of the country. It consisted of three rooms on the ground floor, a little garden in front, a small yard behind. This wet August evening the old

woman slowly swung herself to and fro in the rocking-chair before the fire, while the raindrops slipped from the eaves with a monotonous patter on the single stone step, and the tall clock in the corner ticked on in unison with the raindrops. Year after year that old clock in its curiously carved case had told the minutes—the hours; some that went so slowly—so lagging—with such leaden feet; some that flew as lightly as the gossamer—as sparkling and as evanescent. Just as steadily it had ticked when Granny Darlow—a wee black-eyed toddler—looked up at its yellow time-stained face in childish wonder. It had told the swift minutes — the unrestful days — the long months of smouldering hate—when Granny Darlow's fair-haired husband crossed the threshold. As calmly and monotonously it had pointed to the hour when that husband so suddenly disappeared; and in like manner the quaintly-designed hands had travelled

on their ceaseless round till they reached another hour, in which the white angry billows cast up among the sandhills the body of a fisherman. Still the mechanical heart beat on quietly—steadily; what did it all matter to the old clock? Metal is so much better than flesh and blood. With unvarying tone it marked the flight of its master Time, till the grandchild, Rossela, came under the old roof and looked up at the clock with wondering eyes. Rossela went away, and Granny Darlow sat alone—seemingly alone; for who can tell what shadows peopled to her the dim interior of the little cottage in the August twilight, made duskier by the grey falling rain and lit only by the dull red glow of the embers? Of what was she thinking?—of whom?—as she rocked to and fro in the old chair. Of the present? Of her own skill in brewing mysterious simples from the marsh-land plants for the cure of most of the ills

afflicting the country people? Doubtless Granny was thinking of this, for she glanced at the bundles of dried herbs hanging against the walls. Or did her thoughts drift back to the past?—to the "meadows of memory?" Perhaps stranger plants grew in those shadowy fields than on Wildersmoor.

Patter—patter sang the raindrops outside; ting—tong droned the old clock; a few live coals fell upon the hearth, glowed more redly for a moment, then faded into darkness. The twilight deepened. Still the old woman sat on, gazing into the fire. Presently a footstep sounded on the threshold and a girl entered, a handsome girl with a half-sullen half-defiant expression. Granny Darlow turned her head, and said, in a tone that expressed no surprise:

"So tha hast coom back! I thowt tha would one o' these days."

And stirring the fire, she set the kettle on and then resumed her rocking.

"Ay, I've coom back," replied Rossela, throwing off her wet cloak, "an' what o' that?"

"I know'd as tha 'd make a muddle o' things," said the old woman. "Tha's bound to make a muddle!"

"Tha made summat o' a muddle thysen i' thy young days, if a' folks say is true," retorted Rossela, angrily.

Granny Darlow's eyes lit with sudden fire.

"I got what I wanted an' I wur well satisfied—theer! Tha canna say as much. It isna in thee, to start wi'."

"Anyways, I've getten brass enow to last me awhile. I wur allus saving, so tha needna chunner o'er my coming whoam."

"Brass!" echoed her grandmother, contemptuously, "tha'rt th' soart to think o' brass. It wurna fur brass as I——."

She stopped a moment and then resumed.

"Tha's getten that fro' thy grandfeyther, that's wheer tha's getten it fro'. Tha didna get it fro' me. I'd loike to ha' seen th' mon as would ha' offered me brass. I'd ha' throttled him!"

"Eh, well, I loike a bit o' decent clothes to my back an' decent victuals to my mouth," returned the girl, with a short laugh. "Tha's never had owt barrin' a cotton gown i' summer an' a black stuff fur winter, as wur mostly given thee. An' many's th' toime tha hast made thy meal o' th' shore cockles, an' nobbut this owd roof o'er thy head. I con do better."

"Art tha sure as tha con do better? Dost tha think theer's nowt i' th' world barrin' foine clothes an' victuals? Tha con think as tha loikes. Happen theer's plenty as 'ud agree wi' thee. I dunnot hold wi' it mysen."

"I know'd as tha'd go on loike this," said Rossela, sullenly; "so I've brought

thee nowt. I'd ha' brought thee summat smart if tha'd ha' been civil—tha never wur civil!"

"I wouldna ha' touched it if tha had. Tha con spend tha brass on thysen. It's noan th' soart as suits me."

"Eh, but tha'rt a rare un to moither one!" exclaimed her granddaughter, impatiently. "If a' as is said o' thee is true, tha hast done things as fair frighten folk to speak on, an' tha makes a' this fuss o'er a bit o' brass. I conna understand thee!"

"Happen tha conna," with scorn. "Ay, I'll warrant tha conna! Tha'rt loike th' rest o' folk, only nobbut a bit worse."

And the old woman softly stroked her wrinkled hand, on which shone the worn wedding-ring.

Rossela perceived the gesture, and answered it:

"If I'd a husband," she said, scoffingly, "I shouldna murder him."

"No, tha'rt reet theer, lass. It's noan thy line. Tha'd speak him fair enow so long as he'd brass in 's pocket as tha could get hold on; an' a' th' toime tha'd ha' a chap ready to coom in at th' back door th' minute he wur out at the front. That's thy line, lass."

"There's one in Woffendale," pursued Rossela, "as is asking me to go to America wi' him. Happen I'll do it."

"Tha con please thysen. If tha stayed here, tha'd ha' to coom down to work, an' that wouldna suit thee."

"No, I reckon I'll do better fur mysen than to go cockle-gathering an' redding-up i' my old age."

"Tha needna worrit over thy owd age; tha'll noan live to it. Theer's nowt lasting i' thee; neither feeling, nor life, nor nowt else."

An angry retort rose to the girl's lips, but at that moment the kettle boiled over,

hissing and spluttering on the hearth, and she rose to prepare the meal; while the old woman lit the oil-lamp that stood in the deep-set little window with its diamond panes of greenish glass.

"Is owd Elkanah at home?" asked Rossela, after a long silence.

"I dunnot know, an' I wouldna tell thee if I did."

"What hast tha getten i' thy head now?" inquired the girl.

But Granny Darlow answered not a word.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE sun next day beat hotly down on Wildersmoor from a cloudless sky. Blind John sat outside his cottage-door on this Sunday morning, arrayed in his best, and smoking a short pipe, while Granny Darlow "redded-up" and prepared his dinner. His curiosity was considerably aroused by Rossela's unexpected return, and, hearing the girl's footstep close by him, he took his pipe out of his mouth, and said:

"Art tha going over to North Rode, lass?"

"Dost tha mean to church? Nay, I am na. Parsons is noan i' my line."

"I didna think they wur," with a chuckle. "Conna thee set down awhile? I'd loike to hear summat o' Lunnon. I'm a bit curious about Lunnon sin' I led that chap o'er the moor. Tha saw it i' th' papers, didn't tha?"

"Did the mon say he wur a Lunnoner?"

"He didna deny it. Eh, but it wur a fog, an' no mistake!"

Here followed a long silence. John resumed his pipe, while Rossela, deep in thought, leant against the doorpost. Before them was the dusty road; beyond it stretched the moorland, now in its full luxuriance of fern and spreading marsh-plants, rank grasses, softest moss, and grey-green willows; with here and there a purple patch of heather where the ground rose higher. The burning sunbeams poured down upon the green rolling expanse, the

rippleless pools where vivid blue dragon-flies darted to and fro among the giant hemlocks. There was a sleepy stillness over everything. Now and then the clatter of dishes within told that Granny Darlow was busy. A soft-footed cat stole across the road and stretched itself out in the hot dust.

"Eh, but it's warm!" remarked John, at length. Then, as if following a previous train of thought, he said, "It's a pity tha didna coom whoam i' toime to see th' wedding, though it wur but quiet-like, seeing as Aveland wur dead not long sin'. Theer wur a mort o' folk, a' Wildersmoor and some fro' Woffendale. An' theer wur dinner at th' Wolf fur everybody. It wur going on a' day, an' same at th' Hall fur th' women. Eh, tha ought to ha' been here, Rossela! It wur a graidly day — it wur that! An' we kept it up, too—ask thy grandam if we didna."

Apparently Rossela did not feel much interest in the wedding festivities, for she made no comment.

"Tha dunnot say owt," grumbled John, presently. "Tha wur allus so took up with thysen tha never had a word fur owt else. Tha hannot told me owt about Lunnon yet."

"Tha likes best to hear thysen talk," replied the girl.

"Nay, nay, a bit o' both. Conna thee tell me summat about it?"

"Theer's nowt to tell."

"Eh, but theer mun be. Art tha going back again?"

"Mind thy own business!"—walking away as Granny Darlow came out.

"Eh, but I'd give summat to know where hoo's been," soliloquized John, as Rossela's departing footsteps struck his ear. "Loike as not, hoo's never been in Lunnon at all! Well, I never thought owt o' that

lass. Is that thee, Granny?" turning his head.

"Ay. Tha'll find thy victuals ready on th' table."

"All reet," getting up. "Hold on a minute. Didn't tha say Rossela wur 'i service i' Lunnon? Hoo dunnot seem to know mooch about it."

"I reckon hoo knows as mooch about Lunnon as tha does," replied the old woman as she left him.

"Hoo wunnot say either," muttered John, "th' owd besom! Eh, but theer's a noice pair on 'em!"

After dinner he repaired to the Grey Wolf, where—seated on a bench outside—he confided his suspicions to Vose.

"Dost tha mind that chap as coom here in th' spring? A Woffendale chap as had been awhile i' Driffield. Gleave wur his name, an' he wur going to try fur a job at Flemings'. He said he'd seen a Wilders-

moor lass down Driffield way, an' fro' what I could make out, hoo wur Rossela Darlow fur sure. Hoo mun ha' been, fur theer isna another lass hereabouts as has left th' place."

"I mind well what he said," responded Vose, "fur I wur standing in th' doorway o' the Snug most o' th' time he wur talking."

"Well," resumed John, "I'd loike to ha' that chap see Rossela. He'd know her again sharp enow. Eh, they're both alike —grandam and lass!"

"Nay," said the landlord, "tha'rt wrong theer, owd lad. Theer's a deal o' difference betwixt 'em—a deal o' difference"—reflectively gazing over the moor. "Fur Rossela, hoo's nowt but ordinary an' a bad un at that. Theer's plenty more o' the same sort up an' down. But theer's summat i' th' owd lass as *is* summat, mark you! I dunnot dislike her mysen, though I'll warrant them

tales are true enow. Hoo's noan like Rossela."

Blind John shook his head unconvinced.

"Hoo'd be a noice missis fur a chap to wed, wi' them moor pools staring him i' th' face," he observed significantly.

"I dunnot know as I'd mind wedding th' owd dame if hoo wur a bit younger," returned Vose, philosophically. "A chap mun risk summat, an' I'd sooner run my chance o' th' pool than ha' Rossela's goings-on. Happen it wur th' mon's own doing mostly. Tha'rt rare an' sharp, owd lad, but tha dunnot understond women."

"Eh, I dunnot want to! It fair beats me to think how th' Lord made 'em loike that — worriting an' moithering! They'll worrit an' moither a mon till he conna tell whether he's standing on his head or his heels, an' then turn round an' say it's a' his doing!"

"They might say th' same o' thee,

owd lad," said Vose, with a broad smile. "Tha dunnot understond 'em—that's what's th' matter wi' thee — tha dunnot understond 'em!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THERE is often a point where many converging roads meet, cross each other in seemingly wild confusion, disentangle themselves, separate once more, stretching away widely divergent; never again to meet at that same point in that same tangle.

Afterwards, those whose lines suddenly tangled on Wildersmoor that golden September looked back to the gossamer month of that year as the point of the converging roads. They had all been drawing towards it—all unconsciously, save Granny. But then Granny was ever on the look-out for

human tangles. She perceived them from afar, as the seaman's eye catches the glitter of icebergs on the swell. And she was likely to prove a sturdy helper, because she possessed the vantage ground of the man who dodges round the outskirts of a fight, watching his opportunity to sail in and deliver his swashing blow.

Through the hot August days Granny looked after the ways of her household, "redded up" for Blind John, wandered about the moor gathering herbs like another Medea, and sat at her cottage door from sunset till the starry waggoner had driven quite over the chimney-pots.

It was the season of shooting-stars. Before Granny's eyes they flashed and fell over the moor. She believed they were rejected souls falling—falling—doomed so to spend the ages. It was the custom on Wildersmoor to call shooting-stars Wanderers, for does not St. Jude speak of

"Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever?" Granny vaguely contemplated the possibility of herself becoming one of these flashing Wanderers. She was not possessed of that amazing conceit which imagines itself so indispensable to the Almighty that pardon is assured. Neither did she contemplate winning Heaven by repentance. "If folk mean to repent o' things, they shouldna do 'em," had been Granny's creed. Granny did not repent of her deeds. So she watched the Wanderers glittering into sight in the blue, falling with glancing flash as of drawn steel, vanishing as swiftly—wandering souls with deadly histories, seeking rest yet never finding it; approaching the sweet familiar earth whereon they sinned and died—perhaps for one brief look at the spot where they had surely been happy for a little space. All these were company for Granny. She knew her Bible; she

knew the life-stories of some who were without doubt Wanderers—Athaliah, who slew all the blood royal; the Daughter of Ethbaal King of the Sidonians; the Women who mourned for Tammuz; the Women who wedded Angels: surely these were doomed to the starry darkness! She felt a sort of affinity with them. As they were, so would she be. Neither did she feel any rebellion against the destiny. The doom was just. Granny had a fine sense of justice, provided the judge was no mortal man. For the fantasy called Human Justice her contempt was immeasurable.

Rossela had gone away. The little cottage on Wildersmoor was not to her taste. To live in such a dwelling one must either be true poet or true peasant. Rossela was neither. She had accordingly drifted away, telling Granny she was going to America.

"Please thysen," the old woman had

responded. She detested her grand-daughter, but being a peasant-woman she did not, like her betters, enjoy turning any fellow-creature — not even a relation — out into the world to starve or not, as chance might dictate. If Rossela chose to stay, the cottage was open to her. However, hard fare and peasant life were not agreeable to Rossela, and the moor was just the moor—wild and ugly, and gaslights were better than stars. Therefore she departed wellnigh as suddenly as she came, observing as she arranged her hat before the cracked little looking-glass, that she would have a day or two in Woffendale before the steamer sailed.

"Woffendale!" echoed the old woman in surprise, "what dost tha want theer?"

"Business wi' owd Elkanah," responded her grand-daughter, with a short laugh.

"He'll send thee about thy business sharp enow."

"Nay, he willna. He'll be glad to see me. I had a letter fro' him i' th' spring a-saying so. I wur allus better at getting hold o' th' brass than tha wert."

"Women o' thy soart con allus get brass," retorted Granny with truth, "an' I shouldna wonder if tha finds a mon fool enow to marry thee. Men-folk mostly loikes them as they con understond. What's owd Elkanah going to pay thee fur?"

"A bit o' help."

"Help?" repeated the old woman, "what sort o' help?"

But Rossela was gone. Granny went to the door and looked after her, puzzled and suspicious, knowing that pursuit and question would be useless.

What help could Rossela give Elkanah Fleming unless in the matter of his son's death? And even in that matter, what could she know about it?

Granny was baffled. A thoroughly base

nature can always baffle a higher, and Granny — crime-stained Granny — was yet an infinitely higher type than her descendant. The more she pondered over Rossela's words the less she liked their possible meaning.

The public interest in Ralph Fleming's death was fading despite the increased reward. Best that it should. A revival of that interest might lead to complications. Rossela's mysterious errand was as a cloud on the horizon; who could tell into what storm it might develope?

Early in September Frances and Quentin came home. On the day they were expected an accident happened at Wildersmoor station. A passenger from Woffendale slipped on getting out and broke his leg. He seemed ill and feeble before he slipped, said the solitary porter when describing the occurrence. The injured man seemed to know the neighbourhood, for he directed

himself to be taken to the Grey Wolf, and dictated a telegram to Dr. McKie.

"I shall do very well at the Wolf," he said. "Lift me carefully. Better put a plank on a ladder, and carry me on that."

The porter accordingly went to the little inn, returning with Vose and William and the short ladder that had served as a bier for Ralph Fleming. Vose was rather flattered by the stranger's readiness to put up at the Wolf, and scrutinized him closely as he was lifted. He was a fair man, of a reddish fairness. His curling hair and moustache were ruddy; his eyes, of a bright blue, had a half laugh in them, and yet were melancholy. No doubt his complexion was once in keeping with the hair; now it was of a deadly waxen pallor, as also were the long-fingered delicate hands.

"Surely I have seen you before, sir?" said Vose, inquiringly.

"I daresay. I have come over to the Hall now and then. My name is Ulyett."

"To be sure, sir, to be sure," responded Vose, carefully raising his end of the ladder; "to be sure," he repeated meditatively. Then with more animation:

"Now, William, walk steady."

"I know how to carry a gentleman," said William, a trifle resentfully. "I helped to carry Mr. Ralph on this here same ladder."

"Mr. Ralph wur dead, tha fool!" replied Vose.

"Was it the same ladder?" asked Ulyett.

"Ay," said William, who was a taciturn lad.

The journey was a short one, the inn being so near the station. As his bearers passed by the Hall, Ulyett saw over the gates a triumphal arch, glowing with the deep tints of late summer flowers—dahlia

and marigold and purple heather—and he guessed its meaning.

"Are they home?"

Vose answered:

"No, sir, not yet. Mr. and Mrs. Fleming 'll be home this afternoon. We put it up early so as it might be ready."

"I will send a note to the Hall for Mr. Fleming when he arrives."

"Very good, sir. William can take it."

"And can I have a front room at the Wolf?"

"Certainly, sir. It's not much of a room for a gentleman."

"I should like it."

No more was said till the Wolf was reached. News of the accident had spread, and there was a small but deeply-interested crowd round the door. Vose and William came to a halt.

"Would you like, sir, to be carried up

now? Or will you wait awhile till the room is put a bit straight for you? Granny Darlow 'll redd it up in half-an-hour."

"I will go up now. Granny can fuss about as she likes when once I am in bed. I feel as if I had had about as much as I can stand."

"That's the chap!" exclaimed a voice—Blind John's.

Ulyett turned his head as his bearers were raising him again.

"Ah," he said, "Blind John!"

"Ay, Blind John," returned that individual, coming forward. "That's it!—Blind John. Him as took thee to North Rode station th' foggy neet Mr. Ralph wur murdered."

Ulyett looked at John curiously, as not having seen him clearly before; then smiled slightly and glanced at Vose.

"I know'd I'd find thee one o' these days," John continued, "I know'd——"

"Howd thy jaw," said Vose, with decision, grasping the situation; "howd thy jaw! Dost tha think an invalid gentleman has nowt to do but to listen to thy moitherings? Get on, William."

William heaved up his end of the ladder and they walked briskly indoors and up the staircase, John's voice sounding after them:

"Moitherings, indeed! I'll see what owd Elkanah Fleming thinks on it—theer!"

The front upper room of the Grey Wolf looked out across the moor along the road leading past the Hall gates. Ulyett had the bed moved so that he could see out of the window without raising his head. Then William retired.

"Will's a good lad. He'll say nowt," observed Vose, as the door closed and William's heavy footsteps slowly descended the stairs. "An' as for John, it's nobbut

John's say-so, an' what o' that! There's no call for you to make yoursen uneasy, sir."

"I am not uneasy. I am so near the end of my tether, that John's recognition is of no consequence one way or another. He is quite right. He did guide me to North Rode that night. Have you kept any papers of that time? I should like to see them by-and-by."

"I did keep a week or two o' the *Woffendale Star*, and you can see 'em an' welcome." Here Vose paused. He felt convinced that Ulyett was the man who struck down Ralph Fleming, but a certain magnetism was beginning to tell upon him. Ralph Fleming had possessed no magnetism. Ulyett's helplessness; the half-pathetic, half-humorous look in the eyes; the charm of the voice—Ulyett had a singularly sweet voice—these things appealed to the generosity which was a characteristic of the

landlord of the Wolf. He cleared his throat and resumed :

" This here room, sir, is yours as long as you wish ; but if so be as you should feel worrited about th' papers an' John's moitherings, there's ways o' getting across the moor, an' boats at North Rode that'll make a trip to Man any day you like. I've a cousin in Man—a farmer there. He's noan th' sort to ask questions, an' I reckon folk wouldna ask questions of him neither."

While speaking, Vose had carefully averted his eyes from motives of delicacy. Now he turned and met Ulyett's gaze. Vose had the instincts of a dog. He comprehended without exactly knowing what it was that he comprehended. Something in Ulyett's eyes puzzled him. There was appreciative gratitude and trust; and behind these a half-laughing, half-reproachful denial that—as Vose afterwards put it

to himself—"made him think he hadna hit th' right nail on th' head after a'."

Ulyett perceived the vague bewilderment, smiled, and held out his hand, saying simply—"Thank you!" and Vose, grasping the thin fingers, fell completely under the sway of smile and voice.

"So theer's naught for you to fret o'er, sir," he resumed, after a moment's pause. "I'll send Granny up here to straighten things a bit. Being a widower, I've getten no womenfolk about th' place."

He went in search of Granny, and having given her instructions, addressed himself to William, who was meditatively polishing the pewter mugs.

"Will," said Vose, "keep tha mouth shut about this, wilt tha?"

William nodded and observed sententiously, "John willna."

"I know. I'll give him a talking to."

"He's off to owd Elkanah a'ready."

"What!"—Vose jumped up from the massive oaken settle.

"I see him pass in his Sunday clothes, two minutes sin', so I went to door an' watched him to station. Theer's th' whistle!"

Vose dashed out at the front only to see the white smoke of the Woffendale train as it glided behind the Pike.

"Eh, well," he said, coming back, "I'd ha' given summat fur that not to have happened, but it's nobbut natural for a blind mon to be keen after brass. He hasna his sight to help him. Will, tha munnot let anybody upstairs barrin' Granny and th' doctor. I reckon he—" with a jerk of his thumb towards the ceiling to indicate Ulyett—"is one o' them gentlemen wastrels, but fur a' that I like him."

"Mr. Ralph wur nowt to boast on," observed William.

"No, he wurna. An' besides, I've no mind to ha' it said that a gentleman wur took out o' th' Grey Wolf to be hanged. Better get out more o' them pewters, William, theer'll be a mort o' customers to-neet; what wi' th' Hall folk coming home, an' a' this moitherin' o' John's into th' bargain."

Later, McKie arrived in response to the telegram. He saw his patient, and had an interview with Vose, who gave him a brief and graphic account of Blind John's doings. McKie looked grave.

"Gone to Mr. Fleming at Woffendale, has he? And what are ye proposing to do? Mr. Ulyett is ill—verra ill. I'm not meaning his broken leg. That's naething. Just a simple fracture. But he's worn by fever, and his lungs —weel, he'll not last long, and may go quickly."

However convinced the doctor might be of Ulyett's guilt, he did not now feel enthusiastic about hunting him down. McKie belonged to the old-fashioned medical school. He had a friendly feeling towards a patient, merely because the individual was a patient. He regarded sickness and death as enemies; not as valuable allies. A patient was to him as a smitten friend; not a subject or a purse—or both—according to circumstances. And being thus honourable and kindly—that is to say, old-fashioned—the sturdy North Briton was ready to do strenuous battle for Ulyett's liberty during the brief term of life that remained to him. Therefore McKie wished to know Vose's probable course of action.

"Mr. Ulyett seems fair an' honest about it," Vose replied. "He didna deny he wur with John that neet. I've allus

held that a mon munnot lay his doings on other folks. He ought to shoulder 'em hissen, an' then I'll not say but what I'll give him a helping hand. I've told Mr. Ulyett I'll stand by him."

McKie looked relieved.

"I'm glad to hear ye say so. I will see Mr. Fleming when I get back to Woffendale, and I'll look in here again towards evening. That old woman, Granny Darlow, can look after Mr. Ulyett perfectly well. He'll not need much nursing. Only someone handy in case he wants anything. Can she stay with him?"

"Hoo can be here most o' th' neet, sir, an' me an' William can tackle the day in turns."

McKie nodded approval and departed, considerably perturbed in spirit.

"Deil take the lad!" he muttered, as the train bore him back to Woffendale,

"Why couldn't he die on the Coast! I must see Quentin about it."

Little did the doctor imagine how deeply Ulyett's return would concern Fleming.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EARLY in the afternoon Nina Paton drove over to the Hall from North Rode, bringing with her Ptolemy the cat, and Malise the terrier, who had been visiting at the Vicarage while their mistress was away. Nina had vainly tried to bring her husband too.

"Now do come, Cyril. They will be sure to ask me to stay dinner, and how can I stay without you?"

"Why not? If you are not back by six, I'll come on later and fetch you."

"Still I wish you would come. Old Mr. Fleming will be there, and it would

look better. Also they would be pleased to see you."

"I would if it were not Saturday. You know I always prepare my sermon on Saturday afternoon."

"Let it go, and read somebody else's instead," Nina suggested recklessly. "I knew a man who read one of Jeremy Taylor's sermons to his congregation and they liked it a deal better than his own."

Even this soothing idea did not shake the Vicar's resolution. He settled himself firmly in his study with a pile of Christian Fathers on the one hand and another pile of modern reviews on the other; and thus Nina left him, shaking her pretty fair head.

As she passed Sandhayes the old homestead seemed to wear an air of forlornness out of keeping with the sunshine of the warm September day. Yet the place was as carefully tended as ever. Perhaps the

forlornness was in Nina's mind, the reflection of her own regretful thoughts of the many pleasant hours she had passed there—hours which could not return, simply because they had been so pleasant. One may always expect a return of unpleasant times. If you have starved once there is a probability that you will starve again. But if you have been happy once, make the most of those memories, they are all you will get of that kind.

Nina found Dr. McKie at the Hall.

"And how are ye, Mrs. Paton?" he asked, grasping her hand with more than his usual cordiality. "I thought I'd come over to welcome the young folks home, seeing that there is nae father to do it, and auld Elkanah laid up."

"I am sorry to hear old Mr. Fleming is ill. I expected to meet him here."

McKie nodded.

"It was so arranged. But he has had a

good deal of excitement this afternoon—I'll have to tell Quentin about it—and he has had a fit. At his age it is verra uncertain how illness may end. I see ye have brought the Sandhayes beasties with ye, and well they look too! Eh, but it's a sair pity to think of yon house and the friendly times in it—all gone with Aveland. Some men take a deal away with them, Mrs. Paton."

"Yes, oh, yes!" said Nina, touched by the pathos in McKie's voice; "life seems a great muddle, Dr. McKie."

"It's a' a muddle," replied the North Briton, quoting poor Stephen. "For everything ye gain ye lose as much. But it's a grand racket after all," he added with sombre enthusiasm, "and I'm proud to bear ma part in it. Here they are! and the lass as blooming as a June rose! God bless her!"

A bewilderment of greetings, inquiries,

barking of dogs, and arrival of luggage. Then Mrs. Paton critically surveyed her friend, the two being alone in the latter's room, a room looking westward over the moor.

"Are you glad to be home? You look brilliant. I am thankful to have you back. Dr. McKie and I were nearly weeping before you appeared, so melancholy both of us. We shall perk up now and be happy."

"Why not!" Frances laughed and leant out of one of the wide-open windows that let in the sunny warmth of the September afternoon; "why not? I see no reason why we should not all be happy. How good it is to be home! Of course we have had a delightful time, but I should soon grow tired of the southern glare and heat, and pine for the grey coolness here."

"Do you call that grey and cool?" with a nod towards the window.

"Not grey just now, but cool. The sunshine is a golden haze, and does not scorch. Nina, you must stay and dine with us. Shall we send a telegram for your husband?"

Mrs. Paton explained.

"So, you see, he will appear by-and-by. I do not think a telegram would shake his resolution of remaining faithful to his sermon, or his magazine reading. I am never sure which it is."

Later, when the four sat down to dinner, Quentin demanded news of the district.

"We are both pining for news," he declared. "We want to know everything that has happened. Who has got a new dog? Or got engaged? Or built a new stable? Or any other interesting item of that sort. Now surely, Mrs. Paton, you can tell us all about Wildersmoor; and for Woffendale news we look to you, McKie. By the way, I think I will go over there

this evening and see my uncle, if you will excuse me, Frances. I shall not be away more than two hours."

"Shall I come too? Do you think he might like to see me?"

"He would be glad to see ye to-morrow, Mrs. Fleming," said McKie, "but to-night one visitor will be enough for him. And, besides, ye will be tired with your journey. He is well looked after. Miss Esmé is staying for a day or two with Mrs. Holt, and she is a good nurse for a man. It's just vanity and love of meddling that makes her so, but it is useful."

"I have news of Esmé Rusholme for you," said Nina. "She and Travis Crosier are engaged, and he has got a living in Somerset—nobody can imagine how, least of all himself."

Even to Nina it never occurred that her own words to Aveland had caused that Somerset living to fall to Crosier.

Only Quentin knew how it happened, remembering that last day of Aveland's life.

"So they will be married very soon—in a few weeks," Mrs. Paton continued in a tone of extreme satisfaction.

"I recollect your resolve to arrange that marriage, Nina."

Frances Fleming spoke with the most smiling serenity—the most complete oblivion of the reasons Nina had given for promoting Crosier's love affairs.

"She has forgotten what I told her about Esmé," thought Nina, "or does not care—is too happy to care. I suppose a happy marriage always stuffs one's ears with cotton wool and ties a bandage over one's eyes, like a figure of Justice." Then aloud, "Well, yes, it is my fashion of dropping people I dislike down the oubliette. I do not in the least mind its being a pleasant oubliette. Only let me drop them down it—that is all."

"A verra good way," said McKie, "ye just smother them with roses. Nae harm done, and a grand relief. I can sympathize with ye, Mrs. Paton. Miss Esmé is nae favourite of mine. I like yon cousin of hers better, though little did I think I should ever say so."

"What cousin of the Rusholmes' do you mean?" Quentin's tone was one of puzzled surprise.

"Why, yon Ulyett, poor lad! Did ye know he was coming home? He broke his leg in getting out of the train here this morning, and I set it for him at the Grey Wolf. But he is verra ill."

"Here! Ulyett here!" A dark red flush mounted to the very roots of Fleming's hair. "Here!" he repeated, the flush slowly dying.

"Would you like to have Mr. Ulyett brought to the Hall, Quentin?"

Frances made this suggestion, naturally

attributing her husband's evident perturbation to concern for his friend.

"He would be far more comfortable with us than at the Wolf," she continued.

"Thank you, dear. As you have no objection, I think I will bring the poor fellow here. I'll see about it at once, before I go to Woffendale."

In truth, Quentin was so staggered by the unexpectedness of the news that it was with difficulty he pulled himself together. Of course it was probable that Ulyett would return some time, but as long as he did not come across Blind John there seemed little fear of complications. McKie would not have spoken, and only he and John could identify Ulyett with the stranger who crossed the moor that night. Now, however, accident had placed poor Jack in the one house of all others in which his whilom guide was almost certain to recognize him.

When John was not out on the moor, he was sitting at the Wolf. Sooner or later he would inevitably hear Ulyett's voice, and then——

Here McKie's voice broke in upon Fleming's whirling thoughts.

"I am not so sure about bringing Ulyett here. It is my opinion he is safer at the Wolf, with Vose to keep a look-out for him."

"Why a look-out?" Frances asked. "What has Mr. Ulyett done that a look-out should be kept for him? And why cannot we keep as good a look-out as Vose?"

"Weel, I was minded to tell your husband in the train, Mrs. Fleming, but we are all friends here, and the poor lad canna live long, so——," here McKie's gaze rested meditatively on Nina.

"I shall not tell my husband," she said, promptly.

McKie regarded her with approval.

"Ye are a discreet woman, Mrs. Paton. It's just this, Quentin, your uncle's illness is the result of over-excitement. When I was called in there this afternoon I found he had been pairfectly well till he saw two visitors. First a woman—Mrs. Holt saw her, but did not know her. She said she had some information to give about Ralph's death. Your uncle saw her in his study. What she told him naebody knows, but when she left he told Mrs. Holt he had his finger on the murderer, and ordered the carriage. Before he started however, a blind man came, who gave his name as Blind John of Wildersmoor."

"Blind John!" exclaimed Nina.

"I suppose," said Quentin, "John had recognized the man he had guided that night, and came to say so?"

"That is what I conclude," said McKie, in his cautious manner. "Anyway, your

uncle was even mair excited after Blind John's visit, so Mrs. Holt tells me. He expressed an intention of driving straight to the police-station, and had put on his hat when he was seized with a fit. They sent for me, and I was there in ten minutes —in fact, I was on my way to see him. But he is verra bad. Age, ye see, auld age."

"But," said Frances, "even if Mr. Ulyett was the man whom John guided, that does not prove him to have killed Ralph."

"Ye are quite right, Mrs. Fleming; it does not. And I doubt whether a Woffendale jury would convict him, especially as Ralph Fleming was nae favourite. I fear, though, there is evidence enough to send to trial. Further, we cannot tell what the woman's information may have been."

"Jack Ulyett never did it," said Nina

suddenly; "he is not the sort. Besides, were they not friends?"

It was Quentin who replied:

"He and Ralph? In a way. Mutual accommodation. Ralph wanted a companion, and Ulyett wanted money; and he was the better player of the two."

He spoke with a tinge of bitterness. The time came when the name of Ulyett was a sacred memory to Quentin and his wife. But just then poor Jack was to Fleming simply a troublesome friend, who had already worked upon his—Fleming's—feelings for a considerable sum, and who could not even remain on the West Coast, whither a miracle had sent him. Yet despite the momentary bitterness, Quentin was himself again. Not perhaps the radiant host of ten minutes ago, but still himself. A man may be pardoned some little bewilderment when a chasm opens unexpectedly at his feet. Now however,

that he had seen the width and the depth of it, had realized that there was no getting round or over it—in short, no possibility of saving Ulyett from arrest—why, things were straight and clear. He must tell his wife first. That was hard. He looked across the table at her; what would she say? Not that Quentin feared harsh judgment or bitter words; he knew her too well for that. But what would she say to the immediate future?—to his trial and the term of penal servitude which was the most favourable sentence he could hope for? As he thought thus, his eyes fell on the table before him, with its soft glitter of glass, and silver, and shining damask, half in lamplight half in twilight; for the window had been left open and uncurtained this warm September evening. Beyond was the rich darkness of the room, a fitting background for his wife's beauty.

Fleming was fond of his home, and he wondered vaguely how a cell and a plank bed and prison meals would suit him. Would they at last become familiar?—or at least, not so strange and impossible? Well, he would have the happy knowledge that Frances and the Hall would be here—here, ready and waiting for his restoration. He checked his thoughts to listen. His wife was speaking.

"I feel sure," she said slowly, "that if Mr. Ulyett is the man, then the death was an accident. He is not an intentional murderer."

For she had been recalling Ulyett's demeanour when he paid his late visit to Sandhayes that foggy night. He had been his usual courteous self, gentle, saddened, distinctly depressed, with a visible effort to appear cheerful. It was impossible—though to be sure, there is a great variety in murderers — it was impossible to believe

that Ulyett's general behaviour that evening was compatible with his having deliberately killed a friend an hour or two previously. His manner was emphatically against the supposition.

"And I still think," Frances continued, "that he would be better here. As Mr. Fleming is so ill, he cannot order the police to make any arrest."

"He is too ill, certainly," assented McKie; "but the accusation can be no secret. When auld Elkanah is in full blast half Woffendale can hear him. Mrs. Holt will no keep silent, to say naething of the servants. Then there is Blind John to point out the puir laddie, so the police may take action on their own account. Therefore Ulyett is safer at the Wolf for this reason: ye would not know whether or when the police intend arresting him. They would come suddenly upon ye, and ye would not be able to get the

lad away. Now with Vose it would be otherwise. Among his class rumour is as rapid as the telegraph. He'd know what the police meant to do almost as soon as they knew it themselves, and that would give time to consider the best course to pursue. Ulyett's illness is a certain protection to him, and he is mair likely to die in peace at the Wolf than here, kindly though ye mean it, Mrs. Fleming."

"Well then, I will send him some things. The Grey Wolf cooking is not very suitable for an invalid."

At this moment Ulyett's note was brought in.

"He wishes to see me to-morrow," said Quentin, after reading it. "That will be better, as I may be detained at Woffendale. Now, doctor, are you ready? I suppose Ulyett is not restricted as to diet? Send something round there to-night, darling,"

this to Frances. "I am sorry to leave you alone this first evening at home. I will be back as soon as I can. Stay till my return, Mrs. Paton, and I will drive you home."

"Cyril is coming to fetch me, thank you, Mr. Fleming."

"Is he? Well, both of you stay. I shall be glad to see him."

"No, I shall not stay, nor let Cyril do so either," said Nina, when the two men had gone. "We should be simply nuisances. Meanwhile, it is good to have you alone, Frances. I have a million things to say. When I have uttered a quarter of them I will go over to the Wolf and call on Jack Ulyett. I will accompany the basket of dainties and shall do him more good than they will."

Frances laughed.

"Of course. I wonder how Dr. McKie hopes to keep his patient at the Wolf a

secret when by this time half Wildersmoor knows it, and by to-morrow the other half will. No doubt old Peter is at this moment discussing the news with the servants, and will carry it back to North Rode when he drives you home."

"Exactly. I suppose Dr. McKie thought even a gain of a few hours might be something, though I don't see what difference it can possibly make when the poor fellow is tied here by his broken leg. Perhaps the doctor imagined Cyril would think it his duty to inform the police. There he is mistaken, Cyril would do no such thing. He would merely rush over to the Wolf and preach repentance—that is all."

"He would believe John Ulyett guilty?"

"Of course. That is the distinction between a parson and a scientist. The parson believes everyone — either actually

or potentially — guilty of every sin. The scientist believes in no sin save one—the sin of opposing him."

"I hold with the parson — all things considered. Though it would be hard on Jack Ulyett to be exhorted to repentance as a murderer if, as we all think, he is perfectly innocent."

"Well," said Nina reflectively, "I don't know that that matters much. If a man has not committed the particular wrong-doing you are aiming at, it is pretty safe to say he has done lots of other things quite as bad."

"Still it is not the same thing. One would not care to be accused of anything of which one was incapable — theft, for instance."

"True. I am wrong. But if Cyril hears of all this he will certainly take his innings, and I do not blame him. Most people's sins are so silly and monotonous

that it must be a real pleasure to discover a murderer among one's acquaintances. Anyway, poor Jack Ulyett is safe for to-night; I never preach."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THUS it happened that Ulyett had a visitor that evening, a visitor whom Vose ushered upstairs with grave satisfaction and extreme politeness. The landlord of the Grey Wolf was gratified that Mrs. Paton should take a friendly interest in his unlucky guest, and himself carried the basket upstairs also, regardless of Nina's assurances that it could go anywhere.

"Happen Mr. Ulyett 'ud like to see what Mrs. Fleming has sent him, afore William puts th' things i' th' pantry," Vose replied, courteous but resolute,

edging sideways up the narrow staircase.

Ulyett was lying with his face turned towards the open window and the dark moorland beyond. To the left the lights of the Hall could be seen. Perhaps he was looking at them. The room was comfortable; rather large, with a sloping roof; a red drugget covered the floor, the walls had a cheerful if somewhat violent paper. A lamp stood on a table by the bedside, and a little pile of newspapers lay by the lamp.

At Vose's knock Ulyett turned his head, expecting to see Granny Darlow.

"Mrs. Paton! How truly kind of you! I suppose McKie told you I was here?"

"Now do not try to sit up," said Nina, "I am sure you ought not. I have been dining at the Hall, and thought I would come and tell you all the news before I drove home."

"They are back then?" asked Ulyett, meaning Frances and Quentin.

"This afternoon. Dr. McKie and I were at the Hall to meet them. I found him rather low-spirited, but he cheered up when our bride and bridegroom arrived."

"McKie is a good old chap," said Ulyett.

Vose set down the basket in the middle of the floor, placed a chair for Nina, and withdrew.

"That basket is full of good things for you," she said; "Vose insisted on bringing it upstairs. Frances and I have packed it. I trust you feel duly honoured."

"I am very grateful. This sort of thing makes a fellow feel less of an outcast. It is awfully good of you to come and see me, Mrs. Paton. I sent a note to Fleming this evening. Do you happen to know if he got it?"

"Oh, yes, he said he should see you to-morrow. I think he would have come to-night if he had not been obliged to go to Woffendale, because Mr. Fleming senior is ill."

"Old Elkanah? — why, what's the matter? I caught a glimpse of him this morning and he looked all right then."

"He had a fit this afternoon, from over-excitement, I believe."

Ulyett looked thoughtful.

"What was the old boy excited about?"

"Nobody knows exactly, but Dr. McKie is attending him."

"Any other news? What is the chief gossip in Woffendale just now?"

"Well, I think the Fleming wedding and your cousin's approaching one. I suppose you have heard of that?"

"She wrote and told me. Crosier is the man, isn't he? Poor chap!"

"Not so. He is very lucky. A good

living and an excellent wife—what more could Curate desire? What puzzles everybody is how he got the living."

"Interest somehow."

"He says he has none."

"Then somebody wants to get him out of the way—or my cousin Esmé. Were they engaged before he got the living?"

"Not actually engaged, but everyone expected it. I rather helped on the engagement. I was so dreadfully afraid she would marry Mr. Fleming."

Ulyett burst out laughing.

"What!—old Elkanah? That is just like Esmé."

"Oh, no, I meant Quentin Fleming."

"Quentin!—*Quentin!* Never! He was always at the Avelands'—always. He never thought of Esmé. Besides, she intended to marry Ralph."

He pronounced the name easily enough,

Nina wondered whether he knew of what he was suspected.

"Perhaps so," she replied, "but afterwards, when Ralph Fleming was gone, I certainly thought and still think that there was some idea of Quentin taking his cousin's place."

"It was never Fleming's idea. It might have been Esmé's;" Ulyett spoke meditatively.

"Really I ought to apologize for these remarks concerning your cousin."

"Don't mention it," Jack responded, cheerfully, "the relationship isn't my fault. Please tell me some more. What you say is throwing a deal of light on things. I begin to understand."

"There is nothing more to tell. Miss Rusholme gave me the impression of intending to marry Quentin Fleming, and Mrs. Holt seemed to be aiding her."

"I've no doubt of it. Just what the

old girl would do. When did Esmé accept Crosier?"

"Just after the Fleming wedding. He got his living about that time. I assure you, Mr. Ulyett, they are admirably suited. Esmé is quite the ideal woman for the post of Vicaress and Lady Paramount of the village. She will rejoice in mothers' meetings, and clothing-clubs, and all the rest of the civilized savagery. Now, Mr. Ulyett, do not repeat that last remark of mine."

The light of laughter came into Jack's eyes.

"I will not, Mrs. Paton. And I entirely agree. But uncivilized savagery is a trifle worse."

"Is it? I doubt it. At least you need not pretend you like it. You can thresh around, and that is a grand safety-valve. Othello in the stress of domestic life seems to have found solace from the recollection that he had once beaten a Venetian."

"I see. Yes, I admit there is consolation in beating one's Venetian now and then."

"Your cousin Esmé will never wish for a Venetian to beat. This present evil world satisfies her in every respect. She will be perfectly happy, and so will Mr. Crosier. It is an excellent arrangement."

"It is," Ulyett assented. "Now I perfectly comprehend the general state of affairs. Do not go yet, Mrs. Paton," Nina had risen from her chair; "I am sure I have not heard half the news. And I have not asked after your husband."

"He is very well, thank you. I left him writing his sermon."

"More power to his elbow! Perhaps I shall be sending for him—in his priestly capacity."

"He will be very pleased to come," Nina replied; and then they both laughed at the possible interpretation of the words.

"I did not mean that," protested Nina; "you know I only meant politeness."

"Quite so. But I don't suppose my tether will be long. Come and see me again, Mrs. Paton. By-and-by I shall go out and give no more trouble to anybody. Think of me as well as you can."

"Indeed I have never thought badly of you."

"That is more than I deserve." He hesitated a moment and then said, "Have you told me all the recent gossip?"

"I think so," Nina wondered for an instant whether he alluded to the accusation hanging over him, but she supposed he did not yet know that. "Our chief events have been Dr. Aveland's death and then Frances' marriage."

"I was very sorry to hear of Dr. Aveland's death. I had a great respect for him."

"So had I. He leaves a dreadful blank.

I miss him more as time goes on. Good-bye, Mr. Ulyett."

"It was awfully good of you to come. Is there a light on the stairs? I'll ring for Vose to hold this lamp for you."

"Vose has considerately hung a stable lantern on the curve of the stair-rail," said Nina, opening the door and peering down. "It is delightfully archaic. Certainly I will come and see you again. Good-night!"

Then Ulyett turned his face again to the night and fell to pondering over his cousin's letter. Mrs. Paton's account of the country-side gossip by no means agreed with Esmé's. Quentin Fleming could not be pointed at as Ralph's probable murderer, or surely Nina Paton would have known. Perhaps she did not mention it, he being Quentin's friend. Yet that would be a reason for doing so. But Vose had accepted John's denunciation of his guest without the

slightest hesitation; another argument contrary to Esmé's statements. Anyway, her evident animus against Fleming was explained. That had puzzled Ulyett when he read her letter. Now it was all clear—except the matter of Ralph's death. How much did Esmé know? How much did she guess? Whether she knew little or much, she meant evil to Quentin and his wife. It was well that he—Jack Ulyett—had followed his own impulses and returned before death made him helpless. There was yet time to render suspicion powerless for ever. Thinking this, Jack smiled quietly to himself, muttered something about being "a rummy sort of guardian angel," and being weak and easily tired, fell asleep.

By-and-by Vose came in, treading softly. He bent over the sleeper a moment, shook his head and moved away to the table whereon the papers lay beside the lamp, copies of the *Woffendale Star*, bearing dates

of eight months previous. They were the papers which Vose had kept and for which Ulyett had asked. The landlord of the Wolf folded them carefully, shook his head again, and put them in his pocket. He then took out of the Hall basket a bottle of wine and one or two other things. These he placed on the table, doing all with a lightness and quietness surprising in a man of his build and weight. He had about completed his arrangements when the door opened softly and Granny Darlow appeared, trim and neat in the old village dress of an elderly woman, the dress she always wore and that is now so rarely seen. A black gown, with white kerchief over the shoulders and pinned across the bosom, white frilled cap, and strong shoes with steel buckles. This was her Sunday garb. On week days Granny's gown was dark cotton, with a coloured cotton kerchief, or, in winter, a little woollen shawl. To-night, however,

though not Sunday, was an occasion demanding gala dress. When Granny helped to nurse gentry, she felt it due both to herself and them to wear Sunday garments.

She came into the room as quietly as Vose had done. He pointed to the things on the table and to the sleeper. Granny nodded comprehension, and seated herself in a chair by the bed—a motionless little figure with bright black eyes. Then Vose picked up the basket and went away, closing the door behind him. Downstairs William was stolidly serving several men with beer. He looked up as the landlord appeared.

"Blind John just come," he observed laconically, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the Snug.

John was in his usual chair by the fire, his stick between his knees, his mug of "sixpenny" on the table beside him. Only one other man was in the Snug, and

apparently John was beginning the tale of his identification of Ulyett.

"I know'd I'd find him one o' these days, I——"

"John," said Vose's grave voice in the doorway, "I am na blaming thee fur what thou hast done, seeing it wur but natural. 'Tis hard fur a mon wi' no light in his eyes to shift for hissen; therefore I say naught as to how tha earned owd Elkanah's money this afternoon."

"It wur nobbut half o' th' reward," interrupted John, "nobbut half! Some woman had getten half fro' Elkanah afore I coom, an' I'll lay my life it wur that besom Rossela."

"Well," resumed Vose, "th' half 'll make thee comfortable fur thy owd age, an' I dunnot blame thee, being blind as thou art. But mark this, John, so long as Mr. Ulyett stays here at th' Wolf, thou shalt speak naught of him while thou art

in the Wolf too. If thou conna hold thy peace about him and his business within these here walls, thou mun stay outside 'em. For if so be as I hear thee speaking of him or of aught concerning him here at th' Wolf, I'll not ha' thee at th' Wolf. When he is gone, tha con chunner thy fill. Till then tha mun either shut thy mouth while thou art here, or go thy ways. Dost thou understand?"

"Ay, I con understand well enow," a trifle sulkily; "but it's all o'er th' place already."

"Th' place dunnot belong to me," replied Vose with massive decision, "an' the Wolf does. I care nowt what's all o'er th' place. It's th' Wolf I'm talking on, an' mind thee doesna forget what I say."

John was not likely to forget. To be compelled to silence on a topic of such interest was hard indeed; but he could

discuss it outside, and anything was better than quarrelling with Vose, for exclusion from the Grey Wolf meant social death to Blind John. It was his club, his shooting-box, the goal of his day's labour. He collected all the gossip of the moor and retailed it there; in return carrying the news of the outside world to the scattered farms. He would lose half his importance if he lost the right of entrance to the Snug.

"If thou wants to hustle th' gentleman out o' th' road o' th' police, tha con count on me, Vose," said the other man, the man who was listening to John when Vose came in. He was a notorious poacher.

"Thank ye, Jim. I might want help. I conna tell yet. Most like not; but I might."

"Well, tha knows wheer to find me. I'm used to dodging them police chaps."

CHAPTER XXXV.

MRS. HOLT—in a chastened and loquacious mood—met Fleming and McKie at the door of the Woffendale drawing-room.

"Still unconscious, Dr. McKie. I am glad you are back again, Quentin. I am sure it is quite time, with your poor uncle in such a state."

"Well," he replied good-humouredly, "I could hardly have come much sooner, considering he was only taken ill this afternoon."

"Was it this afternoon? I do not remember. In affliction time is not. Is your wife with you?"

"No. She wished to come, but I considered there was no necessity for her to do so."

"Dear Esmé is here," Mrs. Holt went on, not having civility enough to say anything courteous about Frances, but wishing to impress upon Quentin the mistake he had made in not marrying her favourite. "What we should do without dear Esmé I cannot imagine. What a loss her marriage will be to us all—so devoted —so good—so——"

"I think I will go upstairs now and see my uncle."

Mrs. Holt gazed rather blankly after Quentin as he went out of the room, followed by McKie. There was a tone in the younger Fleming's voice which she had not before heard from him, and which reminded her of Elkanah when he happened not to be pleased.

In truth, Quentin's patience was not to

be relied upon that evening. As he went up the wide shallow stairs he thought various things of Mrs. Holt, and none of them polite. The condition in which he found his uncle did not tend to soothe him. Had Elkanah Fleming been conscious, Quentin would have known what had been said by the old man's unexpected visitors that day, and so might have been able to nip all inquiry till Ulyett was safely out of the way. But with Elkanah lying there in stupor, what could be done? There was nothing but to sit down and await developments.

Esmé was there, sitting by the bedside. She rose as the two men entered, and listened to McKie's remarks upon his patient with a really excellent air of deprecating attention and subdued capability, mingled with a certain triumphant importance peculiar to women of her calibre on the eve of marriage. They have run so

many risks, have striven so very hard. For some odd reason offers do not come readily to those who greatly desire them; therefore it is no wonder that Esmé and her sisters behave as though singing the song of Hannah, "I have gotten a man from the Lord."

Esmé contrived to have a word alone with Fleming before he left the house, before indeed he left Elkanah's room, for she called him back from the door.

"I hear that I have to congratulate you, Esmé," he said, returning, "and I do so most heartily. Crosier is a capital fellow."

"Thank you, Quentin," with the sidelong glance peculiar to her, and which Fleming so much disliked; "I am certainly to be congratulated. I shall marry a good man," emphasizing the adjective. "But I wished to speak to you about my cousin Jack. Have you seen him? Of course you are aware he has come back?"

"I have not seen him."

Esmé was puzzled and annoyed. Like all persons of her type she was totally destitute of imagination, and therefore not capable of seeing far ahead. From plebeian feelings of low spite and mean revenge she had written to Ulyett that Quentin was suspected of Ralph Fleming's murder, and would probably be arrested on his return home. Also, she had expressed the hope that Ulyett was not, on the West Coast, amenable to English law, lest he should be called back as a witness; which would be so very unpleasant considering the assistance he had received from Quentin—assistance that would certainly be regarded as a bribe to silence. In thus writing, Esmé had calculated on Jack's mingled rage and dismay causing him to reply immediately, becoming explanatory in his surprised anger—so explanatory that the letter could be sent, accidentally of course,

to a man in Woffendale who hated the whole Fleming family, and who, therefore, could be trusted to stir up the police far more effectually than they would ever bestir themselves.

If, however, Jack kept silence, why then it would clearly be Esmé's duty to mention her suspicions to old Elkanah Fleming before she left Woffendale, lest some innocent person be suspected. But she had never dreamt of Ulyett's prompt return, and was puzzled by it. Not afraid. Oh no, persons like Esmé Rusholme are never afraid of anything. And they are perfectly right. Nothing will ever seriously injure them in mind, body or estate. Are they not brands kept for the burning? Esmé was not afraid, only her cousin's unexpected appearance, together with the elder Fleming's illness, upset her plans. She must see Jack herself and find out his reason for returning. And she further

resolved that if Quentin's guilt was not yet common gossip it very soon should be. Still, she wanted a few points cleared up.

"Before poor Mr. Fleming was taken ill," she said, looking towards the silent figure on the bed, "he was very excited by two people who came to see him from Wildersmoor, a woman and a blind man."

"Both from Wildersmoor?"

"I believe they said so to the servant who showed them in. I was not here at the time. Mrs. Holt can tell you. But I wish to know if Jack sent them?"

"Ulyett? no, I should say not. Impossible!"

"Why impossible?" in her prim, chilly, irritating manner. "Mrs. Holt has heard from one of the maids whose brother is a railway guard, that a gentleman broke his leg at Wildersmoor station this morning, and was taken to the inn close by. I

think that must have been Jack, and these people his messengers."

It was a natural supposition on her part, and Fleming chafed against the necessity that compelled him to evade and dodge. Was it worth while to descend to all this miserable shiftiness? Why not walk to the nearest police-station and give himself up? Probably he would be compelled to do that in a day or two. Why not now? But Frances was at the Hall expecting his return, and as yet knowing nothing, and the need might not arise after all. Ulyett might not be arrested. So Quentin replied with a question:

"Why should he send messengers here?" Esmé shot another sidelong glance at him.

"Because Jack may have something important to communicate respecting poor Ralph's murder. I feel sure the gentleman hurt at Wildersmoor is Jack, and I am

coming to the inn to see him, subject of course, to Mr. Crosier's approval."

This with extreme affectation of meekness.

"Then I suppose we shall be seeing you and Crosier at the Hall?" Fleming edged towards the door as he spoke. "Crosier used to drop in pretty often in my bachelor days."

"Thank you, Quentin, but our visit to Wildersmoor will probably be rather hurried. We both have so many arrangements to make," with a simper. Esmé was oddly old-fashioned in some of her ways.

"Naturally. Good-night, Esmé."

McKie was waiting for him downstairs, listening to Mrs. Holt, whose conversation possessed interest for the doctor just now. He wanted to know all that Elkanah Fleming had said previous to his attack, and Mrs. Holt was recollecting more fragments to be pieced together.

"Several times he mentioned John Ulyett's name, Dr. McKie, though what that worthless fellow has to do with these people coming, and with my poor nephew's death, I really cannot imagine. But no doubt Elkanah's brain was becoming confused. I have always told him that such giving way to excitement was positively sinful."

McKie repeated this to Quentin when they got outside.

"So, ye see, she just knows naething," he added, "and so much the better. What did that hizzy say to ye upstairs?"

Quentin told him.

"Weel, she's owre deep for me. There's something she wants to see Ulyett about, and she'll not take Crosier with her. What it is I canna guess. I have no opinion whatever of Miss Esmé. But perhaps she means to warn him, being his cousin. Yet it might be the reverse; I canna tell. Shall ye see him to-night?"

"I think not. He mentioned to-morrow in his note. How is my uncle?"

"I think badly of him—verra badly. He's auld, ye see, Quentin, and one canna mend that. I shall look in there again later. Here is the station, and I'll leave ye now. I'll be over early to-morrow to see Ulyett."

"Come to breakfast, doctor."

"Thank ye. Mayhap I will."

Fleming got into an empty carriage and sat looking into the night as the Wildersmoor train slowly clanged round the Pike's shoulder. He remembered the night—not many months ago—when returning from Woffendale by that same train, he had thought over Esmé's veiled threats, and resolved to fight to the end. Now he was married, and were it possible he would fight harder than ever, for a blow struck at him must needs also smite Frances. Yet what could he do? Let Ulyett be

arrested? Impossible. It was fate that struck him—fate using various shapes; first the woman who had seen old Elkanah that afternoon. Quentin rightly guessed her to be Rossela Darlow, who probably knew when Ulyett came to Woffendale to see Ralph Fleming, having a grievance against him. Then Ulyett himself; and Blind John. Surely the demoniac spirit with which Jeffries credits inanimate nature must have suddenly possessed the wood of the Wildersmoor platform and the wood and iron of Ulyett's train, that he should miss his footing and break his leg; thus drifting to the Grey Wolf — the one house in the world where his blind guide would hear and recognize him. There yet remained the one chance—Quentin hated himself for thinking of it—that if Elkanah Fleming died, Ulyett might go free; for the police might not care to take action merely on John's word when Quentin did not stir in

the matter. There was Rossela, certainly. What had Rossela said? Probably all she wanted was money from Elkanah. No doubt she had got it, and the matter would end there, so far as she was concerned. She would not gain more by handing Ulyett over to the police. At this point the train rounded the Pike and the soft fresh moorland air smote Quentin's face. Should he tell his wife or not? Better not. Perhaps she need never know. Yet in the event of Ulyett's arrest the secret would come out barely — suddenly. Better tell her. Aveland had heard it and had not shrunk away, and Aveland's daughter saw all things with her father's eyes. Here Fleming caught himself wishing for the dead man back again. Aveland was the sort of man to be remembered in time of trouble, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land of heat and barrenness. Scarred and smitten the rock might be, but in its shadow

was rest. Quentin had not missed him much. A young man does not miss his elders. Had all things gone smoothly with him, the memory of Aveland would have become as a pleasant tale that is told—no more. Now with the threatening storm, the dead man assumed loftier stature in the eyes of those he had left behind, needing the shelter only he could have afforded. He was no longer "poor Aveland," sick and surely dying, but Aveland of the delicate honour, the capable brain, the compassionate heart—and above all, the unchangeableness which is the rarest attribute of humanity. Quentin had felt so sure of his own capacity for protecting his wife from all the chances of this mortal life. Yet now, little more than two months since Aveland's death, sore need had arisen for his presence. Unspeakably thankful would Fleming have been to know that Aveland was still at Sandhayes; not lying in North Rode churchyard. There

was McKie, certainly. He would do his best to take care of Frances while—if he, Quentin, exchanged his home for Woffendale gaol. There were the Patons, too. But what were all these compared to the dead father? Nothing—nothing at all. And the train clanged on monotonously, "nothing—nothing at all!"—till it came to a confused rattling standstill at Wildersmoor station.

The hamlet kept early hours. There were no lights in the cottages. The Grey Wolf alone showed cheerful glimmers above and below. The faint shining above was in Ulyett's room, where Granny sat vigilant. That below, glowing through red curtains, was the lamp that Vose kept burning all night long on the high old-fashioned chimneypiece. The whole year round that lamp burnt steadily, sending a ray into the darkness when every other house was dark and silent. When questioned as to his reason for maintaining this semi-Rosicrucian

custom, Vose merely replied "that his father had done it. Leastways, th' owd chap had burnt a rushlight, which coom to th' same thing. And as theer wur no reason against it, he—Vose—had kept it up. And he'd found it rare an' convenient at times to ha' a light handy."

Fleming turned his back upon the Wolf and walked slowly home. The Hall sparkled with lights, there was no gloom save in the heart of its master. His wife was sitting in the room that had been especially his mother's. The long windows opened down into the gardens at the back of the house, where the rising ground of the Pike had admitted of terraces being made. The windows were both open this warm night, the lamplight streaming out over the flower-beds. A curiously-mingled scent of jasmine and fern floated in with the cool air. Frances sat reading, half in light, half in shadow; the cat Ptolemy, on

the table beside her, the terrier at her feet. Something in the way the light fell on her—something in the turn of the head, reminded her husband of the last time he had seen Aveland alive; that last evening at Sandhayes, when Aveland sat writing between lamplight and starlight, the cat stretching its sleek black length along the table as now it lay by Frances; the dusk outside, the cool air—all were the same, save that here there was no beating of the surf, like the heart of the world pulsing in the gloom. For a moment Quentin wished his wife were not so like her father. The likeness smote him with compunction. It seemed in some subtle manner to give her a double personality and yet to emphasize her loneliness; as though Quentin brought to the dead man news of evil for his child against which he was powerless to guard her. Even as the thought passed through Fleming's mind she turned and saw him standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I DID not hear you come in, Quentin," said Frances, smiling. "You look tired. I will ring for coffee."

"No, thank you" — he crossed the room and sat down near her. "Where is Mrs. Paton?"

"She has gone home. Mr. Paton did not come, so she preferred not to wait. She had the pony-carriage, you know, and old Peter. Before she left she went to see Mr. Ulyett."

"Did she?" Fleming was surprised. It never occurred to him that anyone

would care to see Ulyett. Your opinion of a man depends on the moments in which you look at him. Not your moments; his moments. Nina regarded Jack Ulyett as he was in those brief intervals when some sudden mood lifted him above the mire into which he continually fell; whereas Quentin naturally surveyed him as he sat in the puddle. To Nina, Jack was a good comrade, gentle, soft-voiced, reliable. To Fleming, he was an idle, worthless fellow, only to be assisted because he was an old playmate; because as boys, they had gone mackerel fishing together in a crazy old boat, when they had to bail out the water while Ralph—who made a third—sat quietly catching the fish; and because of many other similar expeditions. Curious how things like these dwell in the memory. Therefore there was kindly feeling between Quentin and Jack. Yet Fleming was genuinely

astonished by Nina's call at the Grey Wolf.

"Did she say how Ulyett was?"

"She told me he seemed very comfortable, but ill. Vose was looking after him in the most fatherly manner, and had sent for Granny Darlow to sit up with him. Nina and I packed a basket with various things. How is Mr. Fleming?"

"He is not conscious. Mrs. Holt talked a good deal. So did Esmé Rusholme, who is there, you know. McKie thinks seriously of the attack. By the way, he will be here to breakfast tomorrow."

"I suppose Dr. McKie is coming to see his patient at the Wolf. I am sorry your uncle is so ill, Quentin. Was anything said about Blind John's visit to him?"

"Nothing of any consequence. But John himself will talk—and others. Esmé

says she shall go to the Wolf to see her cousin. That appears a natural thing to do, but I distrust her."

"For her own sake she would not help to betray him."

"No. But she has a motive which I do not understand. Of that I am sure. She is dangerous. Your father and I discussed this the night before he died. I wish she and Crosier had been married and gone before Ulyett returned."

"My father discussed all this?" said Frances, in astonishment. "Then perhaps it was he who got the living for Mr. Crosier. The patron was an old friend of father's. The thought did cross my mind when I heard of the appointment, but as he had never mentioned the matter in any way, nor seemed to take any interest either in the Rusholmes or Mr. Crosier, my idea seemed only a fancy. I remember that a letter was posted that

night; could it have been to ask for the living?"

"I have no doubt it was so." Fleming got up and walked to the open window, looking out into the dusky garden. He saw how Aveland's last act had been an effort to protect his child from the possibility of the storm that now darkened above her. Quentin turned from the window, and sat down by his wife's side.

In times of stress, one becomes more observant. Quentin was more sensible than ever of her grave beauty while he strove to think of some way of telling her the true history of Ralph's death.

"Why," she asked, lifting puzzled eyes to his, "did my father consider Esmé Rusholme dangerous?"

"Because she either knew, or guessed, who had killed Ralph. She told me so by hints that I could not mistake. And she had a great dislike to me. Your father

knew all this. We were talking together that last night. I told him everything."

When anyone has lived in clear openness, having nothing to conceal, anything secret is peculiarly distasteful. Frances intuitively felt the shadow of knowledge which concerned her, and yet had been hidden from her. Whatever it was, why had she not known it? Then she looked at Quentin's troubled face.

"Dear, if it troubles you to tell me, do not. I have little curiosity. No doubt my father would have told me had he thought it best that I should know."

"We both thought you need never know," replied her husband, with a groan, "and you need never have known but for this unlucky return of Ulyett's. At any moment he may be arrested—and I cannot let him be arrested."

"Could we not manage his escape, if that is all?"

"Yes, but he would not be able to return here, and I have no right to keep a man in hiding because it would make things easy for me. I have been wondering for the last four hours how I should tell you, and I have no better idea now than when I began. But there is only one thing for me to do——"

Here, to Quentin's surprise, his wife suddenly asked,

"If you did nothing — said nothing, would your silence cause Mr. Ulyett's arrest?"

"No; but my speaking would destroy the possibility of it."

Frances pondered a moment, turned a shade paler—her glowing colour had faded in the last few minutes—a slow, dimly-felt conviction was taking possession of her.

"How did your cousin die? And what had Esmé Rusholme to do with it?"

"Esmé, I think, would have married

Ralph, so naturally she felt resentment towards the man who unwittingly caused his death. That is all as far as she is concerned. How pale you look, my darling!"

"Never mind me. You said she knew the man?"

"Well, she has hinted it. Sometimes I have thought it merely a guess—sometimes people guess aright. I do not know. Ralph's death was accidental. I swear it! Don't look like that. We quarrelled, and he struck me. I struck back, and walked away, never dreaming I had done him any serious hurt. When he was brought to the Hall I was so amazed and bewildered at the unexpectedness of it that—as I told your father—I turned coward and kept silence. I told him none knew the truth, unless Esmé's hints meant that she did. But I could not imagine either how she knew, or why she guessed. The man who

crossed the moor was Ulyett, but your father and I thought he would never be identified. That is all."

He finished with a sudden flatness in his voice. Good voices, to sensitive ears, reveal every mood of their owners. It is only the toneless ones that puzzle, because their sound is the same whether uttering harmless platitudes or the blackest treachery. Quentin's was a perpetual echo of his spirit, and now took the flat dulness of dreary expectation. For however he might strive to show a gallant front, it is not precisely exhilarating to contemplate one's own condemnation by one's dearest, with the tolerable certainty of a felon's cell to follow.

"Oh, my dear, I am so sorry for you!"

"Are you?" Fleming was young; his spirits went up with a bound under the stimulus of these words, and the soft clasp of a cool white hand on his hot clenched

ones. "Are you?—then I don't care a hang!"

Here the unfortunate nature of the expression struck him, and he flushed dark red, hoping his wife had not noticed.

"We shall get over it," he went on, his voice taking its natural ring. "I shall not be away long. A Woffendale jury is not likely to be very hard on me."

"There is the judge."

"Well, yes, there is the judge," he admitted. "I must chance that. Perhaps the jury will let me off! Who knows?"

"Mr. Ulyett may not be arrested. Surely, Quentin, you need not speak unless he is?"

"I suppose not. But I had thought of making a clean breast of it at the Woffendale police-station to-morrow. One may as well get it over. I could not stand many more days like this."

He spoke easily—frankly, deceived as

to his wife's real feelings by her apparent calm.

"I hope you will not do that, Quentin. I am sure it would be a great mistake. Mr. Ulyett may not be arrested, may not even be seriously suspected. Your uncle is too ill to do anything, and by the time he is sufficiently recovered to think of these matters, who can tell how things may have changed. As far as I understand, there is no one to actually order the arrest, and it is just possible that Blind John's statement may never reach the ears of the police. I beg of you not to act hastily. Besides, you have arranged to see Mr. Ulyett to-morrow. He may himself have something to say. Your uncle needs you now that he is helpless. There remains Esmé Rusholme. Yet she may not know. In any case——"

Frances' voice died away. This thing had come suddenly upon her. She needed

a little time—a breathing space wherein to look steadfastly at this shadow that had so swiftly arisen.

"No, I am not ill," she said in reply to Quentin's self-reproaches; "I am only a trifle bewildered. I suppose it is because I have never before had anything to fight against. Things have hitherto gone so smoothly with me, and I have as yet hardly realized this. Of course, an innocent man must not suffer, but I cannot see the necessity for your speaking unless he is directly accused—I really cannot, Quentin."

Fleming stooped and kissed his wife's hand.

"It shall be as you wish. Perhaps my idea was hasty. I will see Ulyett the first thing to-morrow. I don't suppose, however, that he has a notion of the suspicion attaching to himself. He was out of England, you know, when all the search was made. Somebody may have sent him a paper

though. Would you like to send for Mrs. Paton?—to stay here, I mean. I should not mind your telling her if it would be any relief to you to talk it over with her."

"No, dear, thank you. It would not be any relief. Putting things into words only makes them worse as a rule. Besides, though I am quite sure of Nina's loyalty, I think a secret is best kept by few knowing it. Its possession would be a trouble and anxiety to her, having to keep it from her husband."

"I forgot Paton. He will probably soon know all though in any case. I am afraid there is no way out of it. For your sake, how I wish there were!"

"I suppose," in rather an unsteady voice, "that the best lives always suffer. If one looks back through the ages, all the best men and women have suffered much one way or another. I suppose one

ought not to cry out, thinking of those others."

"I don't know," said Quentin, ruefully; "another fellow's toothache may be worse than mine, but that does not make mine any better. However, don't you fret, darling. I shall dree my weird and come out all right. I wonder what sort of work they will put me to. Stone-breaking?" He stretched out one arm and threw his head back. "I think I could make the bits fly!"

Frances checked him by a swift gesture.

"Don't, Quentin! I cannot bear it."

"Well, darling, I won't. But the old times were better in crises of life. Then there was always a refuge. If you killed a man by accident, you paid a fine to Holy Church and fought niggers. All of which seems to me much more reasonable than shutting a man up to useless toil."

He ended with a stifled half-gasp, half-groan. The sudden exhilaration was van-

ishing, and ugly reality crowded on his mind. His wife's voice recalled him from a vision of himself in a felon's dress.

"There may be a way, we cannot tell. Let us keep hope as long as it will stay with us, not thrust it out. There must be a way, Quentin."

"The only way is for nothing to happen, for suspicion to die out," said Fleming gloomily.

"And that is possible—quite possible."

The piteous eagerness in Frances' voice had never been there before. She herself was painfully conscious of it, and tried to speak in more hopeful ordinary tones. When a hitherto untroubled life is smitten, the general opinion is that the smiting is eminently wholesome — especially if the smitten life is young and of promise. Pulling at a bramble is not much fun; but how pleasant to give an oak sapling an ugly twist that is likely to remain, and how

annoyed we are if the sapling turns itself straight again. It never occurs to us to express regret at the checking of that fair strong upward life. So in like manner was it a pity that Frances' serene aspiring existence should be thus suddenly shadowed. That sort of thing does no good to a sensitive nature; it is merely the twist in the tree; a pain, a check, and a remembered bitterness.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

All through the quiet summer night Frances thought, hoped, despaired; then hoped again: all the while seeing clearly there was no honourable way out of the coil save the way of confession, of which Quentin himself spoke. When the stars faded she rose and dressed, feeling the need of solitude in the open—that outlying portion of Paradise which is not closed to us. Fleming was sleeping soundly and dreamlessly. He was quite certain Ulyett would be arrested, consequently he had no doubts as to what would be his own fate;

and so he slept well. A vivid imagination is not always a blissful possession. Frances looked at him and pictured him on a plank bed. She had never seen one, but that made no difference. Then she went softly out into the faint blue light of dawn.

The sky was clear and growing brighter every moment; but the hour was so early that the birds were not singing, only twittering sleepily, and the trees not yet awake. A thin white mist hung over the moor, obscuring outline and giving an air of fantastic unreality to the familiar landscape. In the near foreground were the dew-laden harebells—the true flower of the north; so delicate yet so hardy, expressing at once the northern poetic spirit and the northern strength; growing tall and giant-belled in the cool north air, dwindling to pigmy size in the south. There is as much difference between the harebells north and south of Derby as between Great Tom of Lincoln

and the muffin-man's little clapper. On Wildersmoor the harebells grow royally. From August to December they swing in the free breeze—a wild tangle of soft pale lavender-blue, changing to pure light when the sun strikes through them, as a blue diamond glitters.

This warm September dawn the bells hung heavy with dew; indeed they were not awake any more than the trees. Anyone who has watched the dawn miracle out of doors knows how deep in slumber are all things belonging to the day till the finger from the east touches them.

Frances had mechanically taken the moorland track that was nearest the Hall gates. After a few minutes she turned and looked back. The Hall, with the Pike rising behind it, was still visible through the mist, but blurred and shifting, the outlines lost. She sighed and walked on, trying not to think of that which had been

her thought all night. She was seeking peace, composure, the soothing influence of wild nature. Then she would think again, and perhaps the calmer spirit might suggest better hope.

At last she came upon a fallen tree and sat down on it. To those who have lived close to nature there is when in trouble even a faint consolation to be derived from merely sitting on the rough trunk of a fallen tree. The thing is so absolutely without aggressiveness that its very harmlessness becomes friendly. It mutely invites us to rest, and there is no treachery in the invitation. We need not be on the alert to avoid a possible stab. In time of trouble too, the observing powers seem to be quickened. Frances, resting on the tree, noted the roughness of the bark; here and there green with moss, here and there grey with lichen. On her left rose a little hillock all a-tangle with harebells, like a

blue film over the green, and crowned with a bramble thicket mingled with honeysuckle and bracken. In front of her was more bracken, a tall clump of it, and further off, two or three beeches, dimly seen through the mist which in the crescent light became more luminous every moment. To Frances' troubled soul this shining summer mist, enclosing her on every side, was as the Pillar of Cloud that guarded Israel. For a little while it wrapped her round from the world as made by man.

Here was nothing to remind her of the evil of human life—that old serpent which for ever twists and writhes and wounds itself with its own venom. Here was no humanity, but only the rough clean sandy track, the deep wet moss, the tangle of bracken, and honeysuckle, and harebell; the growing light in the surrounding cloud. She sat there as motionless as though part of the dead tree, seeing all

these things with the peculiarly vivid observance that comes in time of stress. Ever after she could recall wellnigh every leaf and twig on which her eyes rested, though she was never able to find that particular spot again.

A light steady tapping sounded in the stillness, a tapping on wood. It was a woodpecker in one of the beeches, a bird seeking its morning meal. To the tapping of the woodpecker Frances went over all the reasons for and against the confession that her husband wished to make that morning. To what end? She asked herself this question, for as Quentin himself had said, there was no way out of it. Ulyett's arrest could not be permitted. Was there any means of preventing it? Surely a sick man might be left in peace, free from any arrest save that inevitable arrest which comes to all. Ulyett was very ill; he might die. Then softly,

gently slid the thought into Frances' mind —if only he would die before Quentin spoke! That would smooth all. If only Ulyett would die!

Nowadays to share the beliefs of our forefathers is regarded as a distinct sign of incipient idiocy. Yet the assumption that evil thoughts were directly inspired by the father of lies was certainly more courteous to human nature than the modern doctrine that they are microbes of our own raising. Frances was sufficiently modern even in her faith to ascribe all evil solely to herself, and even as the thought and wish clearly shaped themselves, just as clearly she became conscious that she was earnestly desiring the death of an innocent man that she and hers might dwell in peace.

"Yes," she said aloud, "he is my Uriah, the man in the way. He is in

the front of the battle, and I am hoping that the sword of the sickness will slay him. I have come to this. I could not have believed that I could come to this—and so quickly!"

There is a good deal of education in earthquakes. Whether it is a kind of knowledge which profiteth, is another matter. This particular earthquake taught to Frances Fleming the truth that as by our affections we may be raised, so also by our affections we may be dragged down. The evil that a man or woman would not do for their own advantage, they will do without scruple for the sake of those dear to them. Everything, even the best and highest, has its black side—as heaven has hell. Every good impulse, every high quality, may be twisted into a devil's weapon. There is none good, no, not one. Somewhere in the most splendid armour of righteousness there is the flaw—perhaps

the only flaw; perhaps, happily, never to be tested. Yet it assuredly is there. Blessed indeed is the wearer, and powerful his guardian angel, if the circumstances of life are so arranged that the spear of temptation never touches that vulnerable spot. And blessed too are those who come out of the fight with their armour only dinted, not pierced through.

The mist round about became thinner —more translucent, as the light of dawn grew and spread over Wildersmoor. But Frances still sat and pondered, repentant of that sudden evil wish, and fearing the future. What she dreaded was possible change in Quentin should fate compel confession. No man comes out of prison precisely the same as he goes in. It might be comparatively easy for him to face it now, but how would he look back upon it? Would he become embittered by the terrible experience? Would he meet

with ridicule and scoffing where now he had only honour.

A little breeze sprang up from seaward; the luminous mist lifted — dissolved — vanished in the glory of the risen sun; and all the world was sparkling green and full of song and life—infinitely joyous, as the Almighty meant it to be. Well indeed is it that Mother Nature consoles by her beauty — her eternal youth; for if she mourned with humanity the whole world would by this time resemble a railway yard! Luckily man is not the only denizen of this earth, and his wants and woes are by no means so important as he thinks. Nature has her elder children to sustain and make happy, and cannot devote all her attention to the fretful whining of her youngest born—the prodigal amid his husks.

So the summer dawn broke divinely on Wildersmoor, as it had broken all through the centuries, no matter what sorrow it

shone upon. Still Frances sat thinking—thinking. Blue dragonflies shot past; a bright-eyed inquisitive wagtail ventured near, glanced at her, and ran away with little short steps and dipping tail — not alarmed, but disdaining to waste time. A scarlet gleam floated by and settled on a willow twig; it was a tiger-moth sunning its black and scarlet and silver. When last she had seen one of those glowing little sparks of life her father had looked upon it too, standing beside her and repeating Keats' lines—

> "Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
> As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings."

Memories like these bring the dead most vividly back, memories of trivial things. Those damask'd wings spread to the sunbeams brought her loss more keenly to mind than aught else could have done. She rose from her rough bark seat and looked towards the north-west with the

vague instinct that urges all wounded animals to return to the place where they have known most peace. Sandhayes lay north-west. It was not visible from where she stood, yet Frances could see the old house clearly before her. Then she realized that Sandhayes no longer existed. The house was there, the empty shell; but that which had been Sandhayes—the pleasant life warmed and protected by her father's presence and affection—this had vanished, as had that father himself. There was no shelter from the storm. Nay, she herself must be the shelter; must think and advise and decide what was best to be done, without having had any serious experience of life. Sandhayes was gone. She turned away and walked slowly homewards.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THAT same morning sun dazzled Vose's eyes as he stood at the door of the Grey Wolf sunning himself after breakfast, as was his custom summer and winter—weather permitting. Someone was coming from the Hall. Vose shaded his eyes with his hand, and perceiving that it was Quentin, advanced to meet him.

"A fine warm morning, sir!"

"It is," assented Fleming. "How is Mr. Ulyett?"

"Going on well, sir, and that wick! His spirit is wonderful considering th' awk-

wardness of things." Vose spoke with delicate emphasis.

"I trust the awkwardness will go no further," said Fleming. "Indeed, I will take care it does not."

Vose nodded.

"Naught o' harm 'll come to Mr. Ulyett at th' Wolf. You con make your mind easy about that, sir. If things get more awkward-like, 'tis but me an' William putting Mr. Ulyett into a hay-cart and away o'er th' moor to a boat an' Man, wheer I've folk as 'll take care of him."

"You're a good fellow, Vose."

The landlord of the Grey Wolf was surprised. He confided to William that "Fleming thought a deal o' Ulyett—fur he wur quite took to."

William meditated.

"I con understond it," he answered at length. "Happen if a chap I loiked wur as near a rope as yon Ulyett, I'd be took to."

But the thought that had given such grateful earnestness to Quentin's voice had been of himself, not of Ulyett. If flight were possible to him—Fleming, would he find such ready, generous help? Assuredly, and he knew it. Vose and William and many more moorland folk would be prompt and willing to aid him, as they were aiding Ulyett, simply because they liked him; and also because the heart of man delighteth in evading a cast-iron law. By-and-by all this will go; it is passing away already. Men will become logical and cowardly, blind to all but the glitter of the thirty pieces.

Thus thinking of Vose and other humble friends, Quentin went up the narrow staircase with a softened feeling. Afterwards he was glad of this.

Ulyett looked more colourless than ever in the morning light, but his eyes were bright and his air cheerful.

"Got my note?" he asked. "Thank you for coming. I was on my way to see you, when I managed to break my leg and so got here." He glanced round the room. "Pretty comfortable, isn't it, Fleming? Not a bad place to die in."

"Don't say that. We will pull you round. I hope you are not worrying about Blind John's mistake. Of course, I shall put that right at once."

Ulyett regarded him with an odd smile:

"John is not mistaken. He led me to North Rode that night."

"I know. But it was I who struck Ralph down. Not that I ever supposed it would hurt him. I kept silence, and thought it had all blown over—till last night. I shall give myself up to-day."

"That must not be—for your wife's sake. She must not know."

"She knows already. I have told her."

"When?" Ulyett spoke sharply, raising himself from his pillows.

"Last night."

Jack sank back again, muttering something that was evidently language.

"To think of you doing such a thing before you saw me! Why, man!—in any serious emergency of life you should always consult the most worthless friend you have. He will not betray your affairs because he has enough of his own to occupy him, and also because your tale—whatever it is—will not surprise him. He has long ago shocked himself out of all possibility of being shocked. Now listen, Fleming. When I parted from you that night I lost my way in the fog, walked somehow in a circle, and came upon you and Ralph quarrelling. That is, I heard your voices, and I went blundering off, as I didn't exactly want to meet Ralph just then. I ran up against an old woman—Granny Darlow, who is

now nursing me devotedly," here Ulyett laughed. "Nursing me devotedly," he repeated. "Well, she put me in the right way once more. But you know, old chap, what a genius I have always had for going crooked! Of course I went wrong again, and finally stumbled on Blind John. You've heard the rest from him as far as North Rode. He thought I went by the Riverton train, but I went to Sandhayes, as I suppose you know. I never imagined I should ever return, and I wanted to see Sandhayes once more."

Jack uttered the name softly—lingeringly, and a light began to dawn on his listener.

"Aveland was the soul of kindness as well as of honour," Ulyett went on. "He permitted me to come to his house, and I appreciated the permission. He was courtesy itself, the same to every guest. If he allowed a man to cross his threshold he

treated that man as a friend. It was balm to my spirit when he kicked Ralph out. He never kicked out me. I am glad fate enables me to repay my debt to him in some sort."

A light dawned on Fleming. He began to regard Ulyett from another point of view—from Aveland's point of view. Certainly there had always been a pleasantness about Jack that had won him friends despite his worthlessness; had, for instance, induced Fleming to help him at a critical time. Yet Quentin had done that more because Jack was an old playmate than from any good opinion of Jack himself.

Ulyett continued:

"So I went to Sandhayes, being permitted; and then I walked to Riverton by the side of the line, and thence to Liverpool, feeling myself a comfortably dead man. Yes, that was it. I had died and was buried. I had managed to bury

myself at last. Thanks to you, old fellow, I could pass the interval between death social and death physical in Africa, instead of in prison. There a Woffendale paper reached me. There was an account of Ralph's death in it, and the hue and cry after Blind John's vanished companion. I reflected a good deal as to whether a tramp had got hold of Ralph, or whether your quarrel had grown more serious and you and he had come to blows. In the latter case I hoped suspicion might still attach itself to me. Then another paper came, which told me public interest in the case was dying, but that old Elkanah—excuse me, Fleming—your worthy uncle, had increased the offered reward."

"That did all the mischief," said Quentin. "It kept people on the look out. Blind John and Rossela Darlow got the reward—divided between them—yesterday afternoon, just before my uncle was taken ill."

"Upon my soul, that blind fellow ought to be much obliged to me! Why, I have made his fortune, and the woman's too. I never gave away so much in charity before. Never had the chance. Was always the receiver. Well, I was going to tell you how I came home. A letter reached me from my cousin Esmé. Is it permissible, I wonder, to call a woman names? If so, how many? And of what sort? The letter fetched me back. No, I have not got it to show you," seeing Fleming about to speak. "I reflected that it was rather an awkward document to be found on me if I happened to die before I reached home. So I burnt it. The gist of it was that suspicion pointed to you, and your arrest was expected daily."

"I cannot imagine," said Quentin, with astonished emphasis, "what object she could have had in writing that. So far as I know, I have never been suspected at all."

"So I find. What put the idea into Esmé's head? Was it simply a lucky shot?"

"Once or twice," said Fleming, slowly, "she has thrown out hints which might or might not imply exact knowledge of Ralph's death. I thought they did, and therefore ignored them. Sometimes she even seemed to utter veiled threats. I have puzzled over them, yet have never come to any settled conclusion. I told Aveland that I believed she knew something of the truth, but how she came by the knowledge I had not the faintest idea."

"What did he say?"

"He thought that if she married Crosier she would not be dangerous to me, and he obtained that living for Crosier in the hope that Esmé would thus be safely got out of the way."

Ulyett nodded.

"That was clever of Aveland. But he

could not know her malignancy as I do. The letter was her parting thrust, given because you very wisely declined to marry her."

"How——?"

"There, old fellow! Don't disturb yourself trying to frame an evasive reply. It is extremely civil of you, but I thoroughly understand my fair relative and see her little game from start to finish. I should have forbidden the banns anyhow. Now listen: Blind John and that woman Rossela have both denounced me, and I have practically told Vose I am the man who struck Ralph down. Also, I have written a confession, got Vose to witness it, and sent it to old Slough the lawyer, with instructions to open it when I am dead. So you see the situation remains where it was, and the story becomes complete with the final touch of my discovery and repentance."

"I cannot permit it," said Fleming, with a gasp of mingled amazement, remorse, and infinite relief. "For what do you take me, Jack, that I should allow an innocent man to be branded for my deed? I——"

"My dear fellow, you cannot help yourself. You must inevitably leave things as I have arranged them. I have given you no choice, for I knew exactly what you would say. If you, in the face of my confession, proclaim yourself the man who killed Ralph, people will only suppose you have suddenly gone crazy. No one will believe you. Whereas everyone will believe me. Ah, people always strive to impress upon one the advantages of a good character: it seems to me there are considerable advantages going with a bad one."

Quentin laid his hand on the thin waxen one nearest to him.

"I thank you from my soul, Jack, but

it cannot be. Wearing a convict's dress would not be half so humiliating to me as letting another man suffer in my stead."

"That's all right," said Ulyett, lightly, "nothing will fall upon me. I have got a through ticket to a place where the Comedy of Errors called Human Justice is never played. My reputation is the only thing that will suffer, and it is already so battered that an extra dint or two cannot matter. I have no near relatives—the Rusholmes are the nearest. My father and mother died when I was a little chap. So there are none to be troubled by my action in this matter. Whereas you——! However, you have no choice, as I said. You simply cannot help yourself. If you told the truth nobody would believe you. I have observed that is usually the case when one speaks the truth."

"You forget Esmé knows, and probably

others; for how did she obtain her knowledge?"

"I do not think she knows. Her suspicions chanced to hit the mark—that was all. When she hears her own cousin is the culprit, she will not be inclined to speak of her former ideas. As for others, there are no others. Unless Granny Darlow overheard the quarrel. I stumbled over her, as I told you, when I sheered off from you and Ralph. If she knows, you can rely on her silence. She suspects something I feel sure, and is prepared to assist you to the utmost—even to helping me out of the world if necessary. I see in her eyes the look of the priest when he laid hands on the scapegoat."

"What——?"

"No, don't say anything to her. It is the old type. I don't know that we have improved upon it. We no longer murder for love or hate, but only for money or

science. I prefer the older reasons. They afford surer footing all round."

"We will take you over to the Hall, Jack, and nurse you there. That woman shall not come near you again."

"I'd rather she did, thanks. I am not afraid, because I know my time is so short it is not worth her while to shorten it. She interests me. She reminds me of an old nigger woman who poisoned a Portuguese on the Coast. He had treated a daughter of hers very badly. Then he got fever and sent for this old woman to nurse him. Those fellows think the blacks dare not revenge themselves. I went to see him on business, and the old negress was sitting by him. There was a look in her eyes that impressed me at the time. Afterwards I recalled it when I heard she had poisoned him. Oh, it's a sweet hole—the Coast! And the population, black and white — especially the white — matches its

climate. I don't wonder that the Almighty repented having made man, particularly after he became a little civilized."

Ulyett stopped suddenly, and fell back among his pillows. Fleming sprang up and poured out some wine.

"Drink this, Jack. Ought you to talk?"

"I like talking. And I am better to-day. By the way, McKie sent me some stuff to take. I believe it is there somewhere. No, I don't want it now. In fact, I don't want it at all. Pour a dose of it into those flower-pots on the sill. It will do just as much good there, and the dear old boy will never know. Macbeth was the only man who had sensible ideas about physic, though I think his plan of throwing it to the dogs was rough on the animals. What was I talking about? Oh, the Coast. Yes, it *is* a hole! But it was the only place for me. I am a failure all

round, Fleming. I should have done better had I been a bigger scamp. I was only a mediocre one. There is the secret of my failure. Did it ever strike you how useful some worthless lives are?"

"Not worthless."

"Yes, worthless. Shreds and tatters. Dummies to draw the bullet that else might lay a better man low. I might have been a respectable member of society, might never have hankered after my neighbour's cash—or anything else that was his, might have gone to church twice every Sunday, and bequeathed a dozen brats to the nation. Then I should not have been the useful dummy I am. Don't mistake me; I am not scoffing at the virtuous. No man serves his country so well as he who leaves it worthy children. I am merely estimating the use of the useless—the tares in the great wheatfield—the 'pitiful rascals' who, as Falstaff points out, are, at any rate, food

for powder. That is it. I am a pitiful rascal, Fleming, and therefore a fitter target than you."

Ulyett stopped, laughed, and resumed:

"It is you straightforward fellows who get into the tightest places. The devil owes you a grudge for not bowing down in the House of Rimmon. And that reminds me — is there an old-fashioned parson anywhere about here? If there is, I don't know that I would not make his life happy by letting him bully me a little. They love a repentant sinner. But he must be old-fashioned. I cannot stand either the new-fangled High Priest in petticoats and biretta, or the bumptious Evangelical who has little Latin and less Greek, and paints the future in the guise of a Woffendale furnace. And as for the Broad Churchman—well, we all know whither the broad way leads. Time was when parsons were content to be gentlemen first and

priests afterwards. Is there one of that sort hanging about anywhere?"

"I think Paton is a thoroughly good fellow," said Quentin.

"I am sure Mrs. Paton is a thoroughly good fellow," said Ulyett. "I suppose it would not do to send for her as the Vicar's deputy, would it? Yet Kinglake maintained that every man ought to be allowed his Egeria."

"My dear fellow, I will send for anybody and anything you please."

Fleming's voice was not so steady as usual. The circumstances were not calculated to steady a man's voice. This was such an entirely new Ulyett.

"No, it isn't a new Ulyett," said the other, reading Quentin's thought, "it is only the bottom of me coming up. When a man is dying the effect is that of deep-sea dredging—it brings up all sorts of unexpected things. I begin to feel important

too. Do you know, Fleming, I am thoroughly enjoying all this."

"More than I am."

"I know, and am sorry. To you it seems humiliating to owe anything to anybody. You have always had life under your feet, as it were. But when a fellow has been kicked from pillar to post—and perfectly aware he deserved it—it's a new and exhilarating sensation to find himself boss of the show. Therefore I am enjoying myself amazingly. Don't spoil my enjoyment by feeling things too much, old fellow."

"Anything you wish, Jack."

Ulyett laughed again.

"Thank you. How surprising that sounds! But you were always ready to stretch a helping hand. Now tell me about Aveland's death. Was it sudden?"

"At the last—yes. But he had been failing rapidly for some time."

"I wish that I could have seen him again. I respected him very deeply. He had great patience, and I am afraid he had suffered much—not from illness, but from life, from poverty."

Fleming felt the words smite him with the old pain of that last evening at Sandhayes; for till Aveland had spoken he had never thought his father's friend had suffered privation.

"You would not be likely to notice that, old fellow," Jack continued, discovering Quentin's regret with that odd insight of his; "you have always been out of all that, lucky for you! It is fellows like me, who have been put to hard shifts themselves, who read the meaning of the lines in a man's face. Once I picked up a penny in the road, and was thankful for it; and once"—here he laughed a little—"a doctor—clever man he was too—recommended a light diet to me when my diet

for some time had been so remarkably light that I was considerably puzzled how to exist at all! I remember thinking what a tremendous joke it was, and how taken aback he would be if I told him how unnecessary was his admonition on that score. I daresay it would have worried him, for he was a good fellow; so it was just as well he didn't know. Did you ever read any of Gissing's books?"

"I think not. Why?"

"Because he is the only writing chap who understands want of cash. There are no fallals about his poverty. No rose-covered cottage with snowy tablecloth, and new-laid eggs, and high-minded sentiment—Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, snug and comfortable. Oh no, Gissing's poverty is the living Lazarus with all his sores well exposed and the flies getting on them; Lazarus in rags—Lazarus in the dirt—Lazarus with no friends but the dogs—

Lazarus altogether beastly! That is the real thing, Fleming. I've no hankering after literary folk as a rule, but I'd like to shake hands with Gissing. It did not matter so much to me. I had no one belonging to me, and could generally turn to and swindle somebody out of a few pounds—or borrow them from you, old fellow. But it must have been awful for a man like Aveland, who could not stoop to things of that sort. This world is no place for an honourable man; the parsons are right. You'll not forget to let Paton know there is some one here in need of the Commination Service?"

"I will fetch him at any time you wish."

"Well, say this afternoon or evening. Whichever suits him."

"I'll drive over and bring him back. My wife would like to see you. We will come this evening if we shall not disturb you."

"Is it likely either of you would disturb me?" asked Jack, his eyes brightening.

"Then Paton will be here this afternoon, and we will appear some time after he has gone—is that right?"

"Quite right, and thanks."

"Don't say that—don't thank me, I mean. What can I say to show what I feel I owe to you?"

"Say nothing"—a laugh sparkled in Ulyett's eyes, "I tell you, I am enjoying it all."

The two men clasped hands. Perhaps in that grasp there was as much expressed as though both had talked for a week. Human speech is very poor save in swearing, then it becomes vigorous and picturesque—a proof of the savagery of the race; for had the gentler emotions been better cultivated, language would have been better adapted to express them.

Quentin went down the narrow stair-

case feeling like Sindbad when he got rid of the Old Man of the Sea. He was free!—free! Then he called himself names for being so exhilarated, when he was only saved by an innocent man taking the burden. Nevertheless, he *was* exhilarated. He walked home quickly, light-hearted as a boy, thinking of what his wife would say —of the sudden smoothing of their lives after the sudden storm. Nothing more to be feared! And this security, this happiness, was owing to Jack Ulyett. Fleming turned and glanced back at the old inn standing in the sunshine. It was a curious thought that the Grey Wolf and Jack Ulyett were for ever to be such landmarks in life to Quentin. Great is the power of small things. Great also the power of worthless things, whether for good or for evil.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

An hour after Quentin had left him Ulyett had another visitor, his cousin Esmé Rusholme. She came in with the subdued, yet cheerful air proper to a sick room, and sank into a chair by the bedside with a prim noiselessness and look of solicitude that did her great credit.

"I am so surprised, Jack, by your return."

"So am I, Esmé. I find it difficult to express my astonishment all round."

There was a brief pause. Esmé was not fluent of speech, particularly with her

cousin Jack ; for the reason that he was—in the matter of tongue—considerably more than her match, and being a relative, was apt to put things with a cousinly frankness that was not agreeable. Instinctively she felt her outer robe of prim piety was her best defence here.

"I am glad at least," she said, "that my letter enabled you to perceive your duty."

"What is my duty?" Ulyett carelessly inquired. "I have observed that the word duty is much used by unpleasant people when they are in a bad temper and wish to worry somebody. What is disturbing you just now, Esmé? You ought to be in the sweetest and happiest of moods. By the way, I have not congratulated you yet. I do though—and all your friends also."

The last few words sounded ambiguous, but his listener evidently understood their

meaning, for the cold eyes had an angry gleam in them as she replied with emphasis:

"Certainly, I am to be congratulated. And I beg you to remember, Jack, that good people do not scoff at the word 'duty.'"

"Did I ever make any pretensions to the adjective? I think not. You and I and Ralph were all pretty well tarred with the same brush, were we not?"

"I do not understand you, Jack. Perhaps your broken leg has caused a little fever? You seem slightly delirious."

Her cousin laughed.

"Truth does sound like delirium, does it not? People hear it so seldom. What I wanted explained was my supposed duty."

"To bring poor Ralph's murderer to justice."

Ulyett gazed at her reflectively. She looked at him with her characteristic side-

long glance, and recognized in his eyes the gleam of contemptuous amusement that had so often aroused her anger. Jack perceived too much. That had always been the reason of her dislike to him. Men of Ulyett's stamp are often excellent judges of character.

"Well, really," he said, "the first brother seems to have bequeathed his own character to all succeeding relations. Why should you so desire me to end this present life with a rope round my neck?"

For once Esmé looked surprised. Usually her face was as primly expressionless as a doll's, but just now she was for a moment surprised.

"Do not be silly, Jack. You know who murdered my poor Ralph."

"Good!" murmured Ulyett, "'my poor Ralph' is good! Very good. Go on."

Esmé shot a venomous glance at him and went on, not noticing the interruption.

"You know all about it. You saw Quentin Fleming strike him down, and you took a bribe of a thousand pounds to keep silence. Justice has been delayed by your concealment"—Esmé was rather fond of copy-book phrases, she thought they sounded well—"it is your clear duty to make amends by revealing the truth."

"Oh, my soul! What a tale! Now if you had got it up on my behalf, Esmé, I might have admired it. As things are, I wish your inventive powers had been exercised in another direction. That letter of yours hurried me home. But for it I should have gone out quietly over there and been dropped into a hole in the sand, comfortably forgotten. You compel me to retire from this too respectable sphere labelled murderer in addition to my other titles of honour. When you more than hinted of suspicion falling upon Fleming, there was no other course open to me but

to come back and own up. I am the man, Esmé. Blind John's companion and all the rest of it. I have written a confession in case I depart this life before judge and jury can decide my fate. So there it is, Esmé."

"It is a plot!" she exclaimed furiously, her grey eyes narrowing like a snake's, as they always did when she was enraged. "I know better. Quentin has bribed you to say this. I will go to the police myself and expose him."

"I would not, if I were you," responded her cousin, calmly. "As I have already been identified by two people, and have, moreover, made my dying speech and confession, it is hardly probable that much notice would be taken of your fancies. Also, as you have caught a parson, and presumably intend to lead an exemplary life in future, it would not be wise of you, Esmé, to draw attention to

Ralph and yourself. For instance, you would find it awkward to explain that week last summer at Ralph's little shooting-box on the moors."

Esmé's face immediately resumed its prim doll aspect, with an underlying suggestion of stubbornness.

"I do not know what you mean. I was never at any shooting-box on the moors."

"Quite right," said Ulyett, approvingly. "Always deny a thing flatly. It is the best policy. Even if your statement is proved a lie, still keep on lying. Many people will believe you. Indeed, such is the vitality of a proved lie that it frequently succeeds in being accepted as truth, even by those who know it to be false. Human nature gravitates naturally towards a lie and pats the liar. When a man or woman speaks the truth we throw stones at them. You will never have stones thrown at you, Esmé."

"I do not know what you mean," she repeated, with the unruffled self-possession of such as she.

Ulyett threw himself back on his pillows and laughed.

"We had a pretty lively week at that little place of Ralph's, had we not? you and Ralph and I. There wasn't much to choose between us, take it all round. Then there was that girl Rossela, who waited on you. I am convinced Ralph had beaten her into civility before our arrival."

"She has sailed for America," said Esmé, incautiously.

"Has she? Ah, with the cash gained by betraying me to old Elkanah. Well, she might come back, or the keepers might turn up and identify you, or the fellow who drove us. Also, you would have to reconcile the discrepancy between your leaving Woffendale and your arrival at your Driffield friend's house."

"If I did go anywhere—which I did not—I went with a relation, yourself."

"I am afraid that excuse would be too thin for the world in general, Esmé; especially considering Ralph's reputation—not to mention that your humble relative was never regarded as a reliable guide for youth. No, Esmé, I fear that really would not do. Even Crosier would hardly swallow it."

"I was never there — never out of Driffield during my stay."

Ulyett nodded.

"Stick to that; it is the safest thing to say. And marry Crosier; it is the safest thing to do. You will make him an excellent wife, and keep him from boring a better woman to death. Women of your type always become pious and domestic in middle age; it is their peculiar hall-mark."

"I suppose all this means that you

intend to say something to Mr. Crosier —to stop my marriage, if possible."

"Not at all, my dear Esmé. You entirely mistake me. I would even hasten your wedding if possible, and would give you the best of characters to Crosier if he asked me. Once married to him, you will be well out of the way, and just now that seems to me a desirable thing. You will be far too busy playing the holy domestic part in Sweet Auburn to find time for worrying your betters—meaning the Flemings. It was really absurd of you to try to marry Quentin. I should have felt obliged to tell him of our cheerful little visit to the moors, and of various other trifles. So you see, Esmé, you never had a chance of him. Let that console you, and reconcile you to the worthy parson and the quiet village to which he is so kindly taking you."

"Mr. Crosier is quite as good a man

as Quentin Fleming, and better; so if you object to my marrying the one you ought also to object to my marrying the other."

"Oh no; Crosier has chosen you of his own free will. Also, as I have said, you will make him an excellent wife. Neither of these reasons applies to Fleming —see?"

Esmé did see. She perceived her own defeat. Well, she had lost her revenge, but all was not gone. There remained Crosier. Ulyett evidently had no intention of disturbing the happy arrangement existing. Much consolation was to be found in a comfortable marriage and the prospect of being chief ruler in schools and school-feasts, parish meetings, missionary lectures, and perhaps—glory of glories—entertaining a bishop. All these visions were so soothing that Esmé, relieved of her fears respecting her engagement, rose briskly,

remarking, "I think, Jack, you are the most utterly worthless man I ever met."

"That is the general opinion, I believe," he replied, cheerfully; "but I think my two partners—you and Ralph—ran me pretty close. There was ingenuity too about your proceedings, Esmé. You played a clever game, and I believe you had a chance of winning if fate had not sent that unlucky day. You meant to marry Ralph, and, considering what he was, you went the right way to work. A solid entanglement will sometimes drag a man like that before the parson when nothing else will. And as a last resource, you could have appealed to old Elkanah, who is a queer moral old boy, and would undoubtedly have taken your part. Yes, Esmé, I saw your game from the first, and admired the cleverness of it. You know I never interfered with it."

"I suppose you did not interfere when you committed murder?"

There was a cold glitter in Esmé's eyes when she said this. Assuredly her dislike of her cousin was not lessening.

He looked oddly at her.

"That was pure accident. Fate interfered, not I."

"Good-bye, Jack! I forgive you."

"Thanks. People usually say that when they mean to be extra nasty. Why don't you put the gilded top on it by telling me you will pray for me?'

"Certainly I will. I always do—for everybody."

Ulyett fell back again on his pillows, and laughed long and loudly, as loudly as his strength permitted.

Esmé smiled pityingly, murmured a gentle "Good-bye," and rustled softly away.

Here let it be said that Esmé's life was throughout smooth and happy. Having duly appeared before Woffendale eyes in white silk and orange-blossom, Mrs. Crosier

now fulfils every duty of a Vicar's wife, and is regarded—by the men—as a pattern to all women of the neighbourhood. And, indeed, women of Esmé's type do undoubtedly make good wives — not good mothers, but certainly good wives. When their first youth is passed they are old in thought and feeling, and easily settle down to a routine of new clothes, domestic trivialities, and small duties, for which they get much praise; as the stagnant pool, though filthy, is quiet, and by-and-by covers itself with soft green blossoming weed. Whereas genius, whether in man or woman, is as the sea, drawn hither and thither by the stars; eternally young, eternally restless with the unrest of strong vitality and quick responsiveness to the attracting stars. This, doubtless, being the reason why rarely-gifted men and women are seldom happy in their marriages. Not many love the sea, its storm and shine, its wrecks, its sunlit

glancing opal, all its beauty and mystery. Better walk by the slimy pool and admire the blossoming weed: it is pretty and useful; the tadpoles are content beneath its shadow; the bitter salt of the sea would not suit them. There is a use for everything in this world. Even the Helots served as warnings.

CHAPTER XL.

THE length of a day is not to be measured by the shadow on the dial. Long after —years after, this September day seemed to several people the longest of their lives. Nay, it was not a day; it was a lifetime. For what is a lifetime? Is it the changes of the sun and moon; the passing of the seasons; the things which are seen? Or is it the changes of thought and crystallization of mood; the ebb and flow of feeling; the things which are unseen? These invisible things then made this one day as many years to those whose

lives met in a tangle at the Grey Wolf for a few brief hours. So much happened; much revulsion of feeling, much turmoil of human spirit in the quiet little inn.

The shadows were lengthening now; shadows of fern and willow, of beech and pine. The yellow sunshine had deepened to marigold; the rooks cawed sleepily round the old Hall. Paton had come and gone. Quentin had returned from Woffendale, where he had been since the morning; and McKie had come with him. Elkanah Fleming remained unconscious, neither better nor worse; perhaps rather worse in that he was not better.

"He is not likely to get over that fit," said McKie, sitting with Quentin in the Hall dining-room, "an auld man canna stand sic upsetting of his hearthstane. Weel, weel, we maun all gang some day. Yon laddie"—with a wag of his head in direction of the Wolf — "is going fast.

He's worse to-day, though he nae thinks it. He has just held on to the last, keeping the life in him till he got home. He'll go like the flame of a candle when ye blow it out. Ay, it's a pity!" here McKie blew a sigh like the starting puff of a locomotive. "Quentin, I'm thinking yon laddie is no what I thought him. There's a glint in his een when he looks at me. He thinks me an auld fool and he's no far wrong. But I'm beginning to see mair than I did. I think better of him. He never touched Ralph, but he knows all about it. The look in his ee tells me that. He is screening somebody, that's what he is doing;" McKie laid a hand impressively on Quentin's knee, "he is screening somebody."

"Me," said Quentin.

"Ye!—are ye daft?"

Yet even as he spoke he saw that it might be true.

"It was accidental of course. The blow

was intentional, but I never supposed it would kill Ralph. I was prepared to own to it if Blind John recognized Ulyett and he was accused. Now however, he has taken steps to prevent my doing so. I——"

But by this time McKie had recovered himself and reviewed the situation. He was unable to discover Ulyett's motive, but that mattered nothing. The advantage thus gained was the main point.

"Quentin, lad," he interrupted solemnly, "ye must let a dying man have his way. Ulyett's right. He'll no live a week, and there's none to suffer by the suspicion. Now don't ye say a word mair. I'm ready to testify to the haill o' creation that yon laddie is in his right mind and of pairfect understanding. He's a clever laddie! I didn't think he had it in him."

"I did not think I had it in me to do an act so unspeakably contemptible as to save myself at another's expense."

"Weel," said McKie, philosophically, "nae doubt there's the making of a grand criminal in maist of us. I would not trouble o'er that, lad. It's none of your doing. How came Ulyett to know? Did he see ye?"

While Fleming explained and the old Scotchman listened with the deepest attention, Frances was sitting in Ulyett's room at the Grey Wolf, trying to put her gratitude into speech that would convey one half of what she felt and thought of the matter.

"It is not right," she said. "We are deeply, unutterably grateful to you, but nothing can make it right."

"The world is full of wrongs, Mrs. Fleming; here is a wrong that does nobody any harm, and is the only good thing I have ever done. Do not deprive me of that satisfaction."

She smiled slightly as she replied:

"You have put it out of my power to do that."

Ulyett was looking his best just now. The man was really happy. "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it." To begin with, he had the recklessness and insouciance of the born gambler, to whom death is but an adverse throw of the dice. Ulyett was one of those men who properly belong to an earlier age. As a soldier of fortune, alternately plundering and fighting, careless of the morrow, snatching gold with one hand and flinging it to a beggar with the other, Jack Ulyett would have been in his element. There is no room nowadays for such men. They will not learn the modern ways of plundering, and they get into trouble. But Ulyett's good angel was evidently a capable fellow, and had pulled his man within reach of a splendid chance at the last. Jack had only to stretch out his hand and take it. And he did. As he

said to Quentin, he was feeling himself the boss of the show. He was able to do a signal service to the woman he admired and reverenced; and at the same time to repay, in better coin than gold, the debt he owed Quentin Fleming. Also, in the background, there were his respect for Aveland, his satisfaction in circumventing his cousin Esmé, and his gambler's pleasure in holding a winning hand. All these motives — mingling with a certain lazy kindliness, a dramatic appreciation of the situation, and a vague hope that at the Day of Reckoning this one grain of corn among the husks might be counted to him for righteousness — all these interwoven thoughts and feelings had exhilarated him. The red rings of his hair curled tightly, his blue eyes sparkled, his whole being radiated a sort of amused content that sent a glow to the deathly pallor of his face, as a light behind porcelain. It was a kindly arrange-

ment, either of his guardian angel or of fate, that permitted Ulyett to be last remembered as he looked then: a long-limbed slender man, with strong delicate hands that showed his breeding — for he came of better blood than his cousins, the Rusholmes—hands that would have grasped a sword-hilt well; with ruddy locks like David the king; and bright eyes, a little hard perhaps, and puckered at the corners; the whole face too, a little hard and lined—scorched, it may be, by too near approach to hell—yet kindly and a trifle pathetic. This was Ulyett at the Grey Wolf; Ulyett just before he died.

Seeing him now, and regarding him with a more observant glance than she had hitherto bestowed on him, Frances felt a return of the wave of remorse which had swept over her on the moor that morning. She had then wished for

Ulyett's death, and had repented of the wish almost before it had taken definite shape in her mind. Now that she knew the generosity of this man, knew what he was doing for her and hers, her repentance of that transient thought became tenfold stronger—the stronger, perhaps, because the wish would be fulfilled. Ulyett would undoubtedly die. A sense of guilt oppressed her and she could not speak of it. Some confessions only give useless pain. When that is so, the confession is best not made. Her repentant sorrow went up from her heart into her eyes and stayed there, since it might not pass her lips. Ulyett saw the shadow and spoke:

"Do not be sorry for me, Mrs. Fleming. Indeed, I am a very lucky fellow. I have never before been of the slightest use to anybody. If you knew what pleasure it gives me to put things a little straight for

your husband. You have no idea how much he did for me."

Here Ulyett devoutly hoped she would never know the story of the stolen money, and how he had been saved from a prison cell by Quentin's generosity. Few people desire omniscience in their friends.

"Whatever Quentin may have done for you must be trifling indeed to what you are doing for us," she said, remorsefully. "I am very glad—I cannot help being glad, yet I know you ought not to do it and we ought not to accept it. I reproach myself for my gladness."

"Why should you? Let us look at the beginning of it all. The initial fault was Ralph's, who made himself so intolerable that no self-respecting man could help hitting him. The result was just accident —ill-luck—the natural tendency of things to go crooked for people who are not so. Had I hit Ralph, nothing would have

happened. As you see, those same crooked things have turned out well for me, giving me a pleasure of which I am wholly unworthy. Your gladness, Mrs. Fleming, cannot equal mine."

She shook her head. There seemed nothing for her to say. She could not urge his removal to the Hall in the face of the fact that he was less safe there than at the Grey Wolf. She could not express a wish to nurse him back to health when she knew that, humanly speaking, his recovery was well-nigh impossible; and that if he did recover, it would be to stand his trial for a blow he had never struck. Convenient, conventional, pretty lies, did not come naturally to Frances. She could but wish, with all her heart, that this miserable coil had never been twisted. And of what use was that? The terrible clear-sightedness that had led her on Wildersmoor to perceive the one way to smooth all, com-

pelled her even now to see it. Ulyett's death was the only way out of the tangle. She had told him his generous self-sacrifice had made her glad. So it had, in the sense of relief. She need no longer fear the future for Quentin. Yet as all things bring their shadows with them, this relief brought its abiding shadow, the perpetual acquiescence in a lie; a position wellnigh intolerable to Aveland's daughter. All her life she must hear the lie and agree to it, concealing the truth. It was better—anything was better than that her husband should be consigned to a convict's cell, to inevitably emerge from it a changed man, and possibly changed for the worse. Oh, yes, to hear and to agree to Ulyett's generous lie was infinitely better. Yet it involved the branding of an innocent man for her own good and for the good of the one nearest to her. Of course, Ulyett's voluntary acceptance of the brand

made it his own act; not hers or another's. Still, the shadow remained, would always remain. It was the loss of freedom of spirit that she felt and resented. Her feet were netted in the tangles of others' lives and must walk warily, losing the old free careless stride. Compared with the shackles worn by many men and women, these tangles were slight indeed; yet they were not slight to Frances. As her father had never sunk into the slovenly apathy of poverty, but chafed and raged against it, thereby saving himself from its degradation; stepping on the surface of the bog he was compelled to traverse, instead of sinking therein—so Frances would never contentedly acquiesce in the lie that assured peace to her and her husband. Always she would fret in spirit against the necessity for seeming agreement; and by that very chafing would be preserved from that fatuous habit of mind common to most people

as life runs on: the habit of believing that all things, even right and wrong, should bow to their convenience; that even a lie is not a lie if it serves any good purpose to them.

Yet, as Frances was most unlikely to adopt the average manner of thinking, the curb was not needed. And the pity of it! The unnecessary fatigue of life involved; and through no fault of hers, as Aveland's poverty had been no fault of his.

She rose with a sudden swift movement, and stood looking down upon Ulyett. It was characteristic of her that having so risen she stood absolutely still. There was a most restful absence of restlessness about Frances.

One can do a deal of thinking in a minute. There he lay, the man whose death was so much desired, would be so useful—the man in the way, as she had said to herself upon the moor. Presently

he would die, and not all her sense of obligation would check her feeling of relief; and ever after she would lie about him, by implication if not in actual words; a hateful necessity that was visibly here and yet seemed no one's fault in particular. That swift rising of hers had been the expression of the sudden desire to flee away — to another planet if need be—away from this necessity. There was one comforting thought: Quentin would not chafe over the matter as she did. Frances knew intuitively that he would accept his friend's generosity as frankly as it was given, would affectionately respect his memory, and enjoy his own rescued life; all of which would be much wiser than her own more serious view. All this, so long to write, passed through her mind in one quick flash as she stood there. And Ulyett, understanding perfectly, said:

"You take it all too seriously, Mrs.

Fleming. Indeed you do. The whole thing resolves itself into—firstly, an accident; secondly, a happy chance for me. That is all. Try to forget me—to forget everything. I am sorry you ever knew. I told your husband so. Had he seen me before telling you, the whole affair would have passed over without your being troubled by the knowledge of it."

"I think it is only fair that I should share Quentin's troubles as well as his happiness."

"Yes, if you do not share his troubles and leave him his happiness," returned Ulyett, smiling. "I mean that Quentin will bear his troubles lightly. By-and-by, when all this is over, he will be as happy as ever; and that is as it should be. I am sure you will agree with me in this. Well, if you permit his bygone troubles to sadden you, are you not refusing to share his happiness? But here am I pre-

suming to offer you advice. I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"Not at all. You are quite right. Yet I cannot help regretting the injustice to you."

"Oh, as to that, I much prefer it to having justice done me. The due reward of my deeds would by no means conduce to my comfort. Leave me the injustice, Mrs. Fleming. It is really no injustice at all, but the simple payment of a debt I owe your husband. And indeed, I am deeply in debt all round, for the happiest days of my life were spent at Sandhayes."

"Were they? I am glad." Frances spoke with surprise and self-reproach, remembering how quietly this man used to follow Quentin into the old house, saying little, never obtruding himself, content to sit back and look on, perhaps throwing in a word now and then. She remembered,

too, how her father had seemed to like him; talking to him a good deal, noticing him more than most people did, for Ulyett was in the position of a black sheep without any wool to sell. He had been a very meek black sheep at Sandhayes: silent, courteous, soft-voiced, observant of others' wishes, drifting in with Quentin, and out again when he left, rarely coming alone, and then only with a deprecatory air that might not have become many men, but which sat well on Ulyett with his sinewy grace, subdued swagger, and hawk-like look—a somewhat battered, thoroughly-tame-for-the-time Free Companion.

In those days Frances had regarded him chiefly as a piece of furniture which Quentin was in the habit of carrying about with him, and which was therefore to be treated kindly for Quentin's sake. So far as she had been conscious of any particular feeling towards him, it was one of vague dislike simply

because he was intimate with Ralph Fleming, whom she detested. Therefore it had so happened that the man himself—Jack Ulyett—she had not noticed much. Also he had been overshadowed by his friend Quentin. Beside Fleming's height and breadth and debonair good looks, Jack's lean and battered picturesqueness seemed somehow to fade into the background. Here, however, alone in this poor room, he could be seen as he really was: worn, battered, yet undeniably picturesque, with the indefinable stamp of breeding from head to heel, and that rarest of charms, a very beautiful speaking voice. Numberless men and women can sing divinely, but how many can speak divinely? On Ulyett this gift had been bestowed in its fulness; no sweeter, more persuasive tones were possible.

"I was always very happy at Sandhayes," he repeated.

And Frances, remembering him at her old home felt constrained to say :

"I have never done you justice in any way. I am sorry."

Which fell exquisitely on Jack's ears. But he answered with his customary light soft gaiety :

"Did I not say I should be scared if I heard that I should meet with justice ? Believe me, I am nothing, Mrs. Fleming, nothing worth your attention for one moment. You and your father made me very happy, wholly undeserved happiness. And I am happy now. Undeservedly so again."

"You will try to get well ?" she said, almost imploringly, completely forgetting for the moment what awaited them all if he did get well.

"I doubt whether I should succeed ! Better not. I shall never have another such chance of departing this life in peace.

My star is just now in the ascendant. Best not wait for its inevitable declination."

Modern women do not weep. The facile tearfulness of old has vanished before freedom. But it was with a distinct effort that Frances spoke again:

"We will not lose you if anything can save. Quentin is coming to sit with you to-night. He thinks Granny Darlow is too old. So he and Vose will take turns."

"Fleming is very good. I can assure him, though, that Granny is capable as though she was twenty—more so, in fact. I must not be a burden to you."

"No burden, as you know. I must go now. I will come again to morrow, and try to thank you."

"I am more than thanked by your coming to-day."

Frances shook her head and smiled, held out her hand to him and looked

round the room to see what more she could send for his comfort, begging him to say what he would like. Whereupon he protested there was nothing he needed; he had all he wished.

Left alone, Ulyett turned to the window, whence he could see the road to the Hall. He watched Frances walking home in the gold of the evening sunshine, saw Quentin meet her at the gates, then the curve of the drive hid them both from Jack's sight.

CHAPTER XLI.

When Vose came in a little later to know his guest's pleasure concerning dinner, he was struck by an indefinable change in Ulyett. He seemed to have suddenly become more transparent, more pinched about the features.

"Are you not feeling so well, sir?" Vose inquired. "Because theer's William to go up to th' Hall any minute fur Dr. McKie. He's dining theer to-night."

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you. Much the same as usual. Where is Granny Darlow?"

"Hoo's nigh if so be as you want her, sir. But Mr. Quentin said he'd coom hissen an' sit with you to-night. He didna seem to think much o' Granny fur sitting up. Not but what hoo's wick enow," added Vose. He always stood up for Granny.

"I should like to see the old woman for a few minutes."

"I'll send her up, sir."

The landlord was edging out of the narrow door when Ulyett stopped him by suddenly asking, "Vose, where shall I be buried?"

The unexpected question was not startling to Vose. As a true northern man, he held a certain solicitude about the place of one's burial to be decent and fitting. He stroked his chin meditatively.

"Well, sir, I reckon that's as you please."

"I should like to be buried at North Rode."

"Very good, sir. I'll tell Mr. Quentin if so be——"

Vose's delicacy left the sentence unfinished. He gently closed the door, and went downstairs into the big sanded bar-room, which at the Wolf ought perhaps to be more correctly called by its old name of the "house-place." Here before a noble fire — the fire that burnt on the hearth of the Wolf winter and summer, regardless of season—William was assiduously basting a fowl intended for Ulyett's dinner, and conversing with a customer seated in the chimney-corner, the poacher who had volunteered to assist in concealing Ulyett from the police if need be.

"He thinks he's going to dee," said Vose, in tones of concern, jerking his thumb upwards, to signify the individual meant.

"Do he?" exclaimed the poacher.

William paused in his basting, holding the big iron spoon aloft.

"Owd McKie didna seem to think so," pursued Vose, vexedly, "an' I dunnot want to think so either. It's a pity!"

"I dunno," said William, reflectively.

"Happen th' gentleman knows best hissen," said the poacher, "but I'll own to being a bit disappointed. I wur reckoning o' helping him dodge them police, and wur thinking how lucky it wur that I wur out o' gaol. It seemed providential-loike."

"Ay, it did," assented Vose. "William, go an' fetch Granny Darlow. He wants to see th' owd lass. I'll baste th' bird while thou'rt gone."

"Nay—nay," the poacher interposed, politely, "I'll look to th' cooking. I'm a rare good cook, as my missis could tell thee. Th' bird 'll wait till I've filled my pipe."

He rammed the tobacco down with his finger, lit it with a live coal in the tongs,

pulled his chair in front of the fire, turned up his sleeves, and proceeded to baste the fowl with a dexterity that threw William's skill into the shade.

Granny had gone cockle-gathering, but might be home any minute; so William heard from a neighbour.

"That's as well," said Vose, "fur if theer's any more talking to be done it's time Mr. Ulyett had summat to eat first. He's getten a look as worrits me."

"Happen this 'll fettle him a bit," observed the poacher, referring to the sizzling bird.

He turned his head as he spoke to look at a stranger who was entering, a smooth-shaven, rather heavy-looking man; who ordered ale, and then inquired whether he could lodge there for a day or two. At this, Poaching Jim half-turned in his chair, caught Vose's eye, made a rapid circle round his own wrists behind the new-comer's

back, and resumed his care of the fowl. William pensively seated himself on the bottom step of the narrow staircase that rose straight out of the living-room.

"I've got noan room fur lodgers," Vose answered, a trifle surlily. "I dunnot care about 'em."

"There's a saying about Woffendale that you've got one anyways, an invalid gentleman that Blind John knows. Of course, it's the duty of the police to find Mr. Ralph Fleming's murderer, so I thought I'd come here and keep an eye on him without inconveniencing you, Mr. Vose."

"I conna say what Blind John may ha' said or not ha' said," replied Vose, slowly, "but this I know, that I'm dom'd if I'll ha' th' owd Wolf turned into th' Woffendale lockups! If thee wants to keep an eye on th' place, thee con put a sentry-box outside an' stay theer. But what tha thinks to gain by it beats me. Owd Elkanah 'ud

believe owt, as is only natural; an' he's like to dee, so he'll noan ha' a chance of thanking thee. An' young Fleming—Mr. Quentin, an' th' invalid gentleman is great friends. A noice doment Mr. Quentin 'ud make if his friend couldna dee in peace."

The stranger seemed rather puzzled.

"Then the family do not believe Blind John's statement? I am a detective, and it is a good case to work up. If I brought a warrant with me, Mr. Vose, you would be compelled to recognize the majesty of the law."

"Dom the majesty of the law!" said Vose.

"And it is not to be denied that you have suspicious characters here. I'll swear I've seen that man in Woffendale gaol," turning suddenly to the poacher.

"Why o' course tha has," responded the culprit, unabashed, "an' it's more than loikely tha 'll see me theer again, if tha

lives long enow. But tha needna glower at me. I've done my toime an' it's my close season now!" with a grin.

There was an audible chuckle from William on guard on the stairs. But Vose was too angry to be amused by anything.

"Hast thou said thy say?" he inquired of the stranger, with ominous calm, "because theer's th' door. Tha'll ha' to coom wi' a warrant afore thou crosses th' threshold again."

"All right," said the man, finishing his ale, "most like I'll be here to-morrow." He sauntered out of the Wolf, looked round hesitatingly, then set off towards the station.

"He'll just catch the Woffendale train," said the poacher. "I'll go an' ask th' porter if he went by it."

"Who's th' chap? Police?" inquired Vose.

"Nay, he just touts for 'em. Ferrets about an' brings 'em news. Saves them trouble an' gets summat fur his. He's keen on rewards. I reckon he's mad at losing owd Elkanah's. Happen he thought th' owd chap would give him something if he helped to nab th' gentleman."

"I wish I'd helped him out with my foot!" said Vose, regretfully. "Why didn't thee think on 't, William?"

"I did," replied William, "but I wur feart o' leaving th' stair."

"Ne'er mind," said the poacher, "I'll wring's neck one o' these days. I'm pretty sure it wur him that set keepers on to me last toime. What art tha going to do about th' gentleman? Theer's th' hut on th' moor. We might put him theer till we see whether th' chap brings th' police here or no in th' morning."

"Th' sea is like a pond this weather, an' a boat would take him to Man safe

enow," replied Vose. "I'll up to the Hall an' see Mr. Quentin about it."

But when Vose got there he was met by the news that Fleming and McKie had gone to Woffendale in the train that had just left the station with the self-constituted detective in it.

"I wanted to see Mr. Fleming," said Vose.

He would be back by ten, the servant said. He had gone because a telegram had come to say the old gentleman was dead.

"What!—owd Elkanah!" exclaimed Vose. This was wholly unexpected. He pondered a moment, then said, "You needna tell Mrs. Fleming I came. Theer's no call to disturb her. I'll see Mr. Fleming later. Tell him I've been here."

And Vose returned to the Grey Wolf with the news.

"That'll settle th' detective chap most like," said the poacher.

"I dunno," said William. "He conna get owt from Elkanah now, but he might get summat from police. Me an' Jim's been thinking," he continued, addressing Vose, "that if so be as th' police coom, we might carry Mr. Ulyett out at th' back to Granny Darlow's till we could get him off 'i th' neet."

"Ay, that's a good thought. We'll do it. Has Granny come?"

She had arrived a minute ago and was upstairs, sitting motionless by Ulyett's bedside. He had asked for his purse, and was looking into it with an expression of careless dismay. The last few hours had changed him greatly. The glow had faded out of his face, leaving it pinched and waxen; his voice, too, was weaker.

"Upon my soul," he said, with his old vivacity, "there's not enough cash to bury me decently! Well, I've been dipping into other people's pockets all my life, and it is evident I shall keep it up to the end. Granny, there's a pound or two for you, with thanks for your care of me, and yet more thanks for not administering that little dose you thought of. You see there is no need of it."

"Thou art a good pluck'd un! I shouldna ha' thought it of thee," said Granny, with reluctant admiration. "Ay, I meant to kill thee if thou didna dee natural like."

"I shall die natural like," he said, with a faint laugh.

"Thou art safe enow fro' me," Granny went on, "I didna know what soart tha was. How could I? If thou hast done nowt good but this i' a' thy life, thou hast done well. Thou art safe enow fro'

me, I tell thee. An' I willna take th' brass."

"Why not? You deserve it for sitting up with me last night."

"That wur nowt. I wur glad to be by to see how things wur going on. I willna take it."

And she did not.

"Well, we will argue it out by-and-by," said Ulyett. "I'll have a sleep now. I am tired."

He slept on while the west faded from red to orange, then to clear green; and the stars came out overhead in the blue. Vose came softly into the room with a shaded light, and Ulyett stirred and opened his eyes.

"Ah," he said, vaguely, "Vose, is it? Good fellow, Vose. Thank you."

Then falling into sleep again, the gambler, thief, and kindly gentleman passed away so quietly that neither Vose

nor Granny, though both were sitting by him, knew when he ceased to breathe. But when Quentin came at ten o'clock, Ulyett was gone.

CHAPTER XLII.

He was buried at North Rode as he wished, near Aveland. Many attended the funeral, for the circumstances of his death and the universal belief that he was Ralph Fleming's murderer, caused all Wildersmoor to feel greatly interested in poor Jack. It was surprising to the moor folk that Quentin and his wife both followed Ulyett to his last rest.

"They conna believe he did it," was the general comment, "it's queer what fancies gentry has!"

Gradually the crowd dispersed, after

seeing the Hall carriage drive off. Nina Paton lingered last by the grave. She was puzzled. She felt certain there was a mystery somewhere, yet what was it? She did not believe in Ulyett's guilt, and said so. But she had met with no encouragement from Frances and her husband. They seemed to listen with a sort of pained silence and a desire to escape from discussing the matter.

"They believe he did it," thought Nina, coming to a precisely opposite conclusion to that of the crowd. "But why not argue it with me? Curious! I cannot make it out. I wish he had lived till the next morning, then I should have seen him again. No, he never did it!"

Here Nina raised her eyes, and there opposite to her, the grave between them, stood Granny Darlow. She too had lingered behind the crowd. Hardly knowing why, Nina uttered the thought in her heart,

asked the question of this strange old woman who had helped to nurse him :

"Did he do it?"

"Ay, I'm sure he did." Granny spoke with the convincing calm of a naturally truthful individual telling a deliberate lie. The habitual liar fails to convince by reason of a certain shiftiness visible in him. His words lack the solid weight of the usually truthful.

"I don't know what to think," said Nina, half to herself.

"I wouldna think owt about it if I wur thee," said Granny. "Th' chap's dead, an' theer it is."

There it is!—the words echoed in Nina's mind, bringing a curious sense of impotence. Granny went away, and the Vicar came out of the church.

"Cyril," said his wife, as they walked home, "I wonder if Jack Ulyett really did kill Ralph Fleming?"

"Of course. There can be no question about it. He was recognized by the blind man, John, and died truly penitent."

"Penitent for killing Ralph Fleming! Really, Cyril, I do not think I could feel penitent for killing Ralph Fleming. I should regard myself as a public benefactor. To rid a place of a man like that is much better than giving it free libraries or swimming baths."

"My dear!"

"Did he actually confess it?"

The Vicar paused and considered a moment.

"No," he said, "Mr. Ulyett did not specifically confess the murder, but he acknowledged himself a great sinner and did not deny that he was the missing stranger. I think there can be no doubt. Especially as the reward was paid by Mr. Fleming senior, proving that he at least, was satisfied respecting the evidence.

Probably, had Elkanah Fleming lived, we should have heard more; but as both he and Ulyett are dead, I think Quentin Fleming is right in letting the matter drop as much as possible. It must be very painful for the Rusholmes, and any other relatives Ulyett may have."

"I shall never believe Jack Ulyett did it," said Nina.

"That is nonsense, my dear."

"Who is to decide what is nonsense? You recollect Falstaff? 'Instinct is a great matter. I was a coward upon instinct.' I am a believer upon instinct."

"Only because you happened to like the man."

"Because I liked the man I understand him better. I am not sure that one can ever understand a thing one does not like."

The Vicar mused.

"That may be so. But I rather liked Ulyett myself."

"And yet you believe him guilty?"

"And yet I believe him guilty. He must be, or he would have denied it. He knew he was suspected."

"I am not sure of that. He may have had some reason for silence."

"Mere fancies of yours, Nina. There is no secret whatever now that Ulyett has been recognized as the stranger. That was the only secret in the sad affair."

"My dear Cyril, for thousands of years you men have been trying to keep secrets from us, and we have been trying to find them out. Which process do you think is the more likely to sharpen the perceptions? I tell you a woman can smell a secret as a seaman smells ice, though neither can describe how they do it. There *is* a secret in this affair. Of that I am positive. My instinct tells me so. But I cannot imagine what it is."

"Why waste time in wondering about a mere guess?"

"Why does a cat waste time sitting at a mouse-hole? Because she knows the mouse is there, and hopes it will come out presently. Perhaps my mouse will come out some day."

But it never did.

As after a storm the sea settles slowly into calm, so after the stress of those two days life gradually laid aside its tragic mask and resumed its customary Wildersmoor garments of "grey honour and sweet rest." For sweet rest is always there on the moorland; and far away in the dim years to come, grey honour.

One evening a month later a soft drizzling rain was falling over Wildersmoor. The air was warm—autumn is usually warm there — and not the faintest breeze was stirring. Through the fine rain the lights of the Grey Wolf gleamed cheerily; then the dimmer lights in the cottages; and,

further on, the lights at the Hall. The night was so still that one could hear the raindrops falling and distinguish on what they fell; whether the road, or the mossy peat, or dripped from the eaves on to the stone steps of the cottages, or splashed into an ever-widening puddle.

Granny Darlow, sitting solitary by her own hearth, rocked herself to and fro in the old rocking-chair, the flickering blaze lighting up her white hair and wrinkled face, and casting her shadow—exaggerated and fantastic—on walls and ceiling as she swung. Through the soft patter of the rain came the sound of a tapping stick. It paused outside, and with a knock at the door, Blind John stood on the threshold. The old woman turned her head.

"What dost want?" she asked.

"Hast tha heard fro' Rossela sin' hoo went to America?"

"Nay, I hannot."

"Well, that's summat to be thankful fur! I've getten a bit o' news fur thee. Owd Elkanah's brass is a' left to Mrs. Fleming—her that was Miss Aveland—tied on her hard and fast by th' lawyers. Did tha ever!"

"Tha hast no need to chunner. Tha got thy share o' Elkanah's brass," replied Granny.

"Ay, I did," complacently. "That wur a stroke o' luck! I reckon I've getten enow to marry on."

"So tha has. An' theer's plenty o' women fools enow to take thee; but theer's never a woman but what'll be sharp enow to cheat thee when hoo's getten thee."

John muttered something that sounded like "owd besom!" then said aloud, "Tha mun be thinking o' Rossela. I might ha' thought on her too if hoo hadna been o'er flighty. We might ha' been comfortable wi' a' th' reward between us. Seven

hundred pound isna bad fur man an' wife to start housekeepin' wi'. But Rossela's o'er flighty. I'll get a better lass wi' my three hundred an' fifty."

Here Granny stirred impatiently, and John hastily added:

"I'm going on to th' Wolf to tell 'em about owd Elkanah's brass. Good-neet to thee!"

He went away, the tapping of his stick dying in the distance. Granny stretched her withered hands over the fire, and laughed.

"Th' owd fool!" she said.

At last the tapping ceased. John had turned into the Grey Wolf.

THE END.

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